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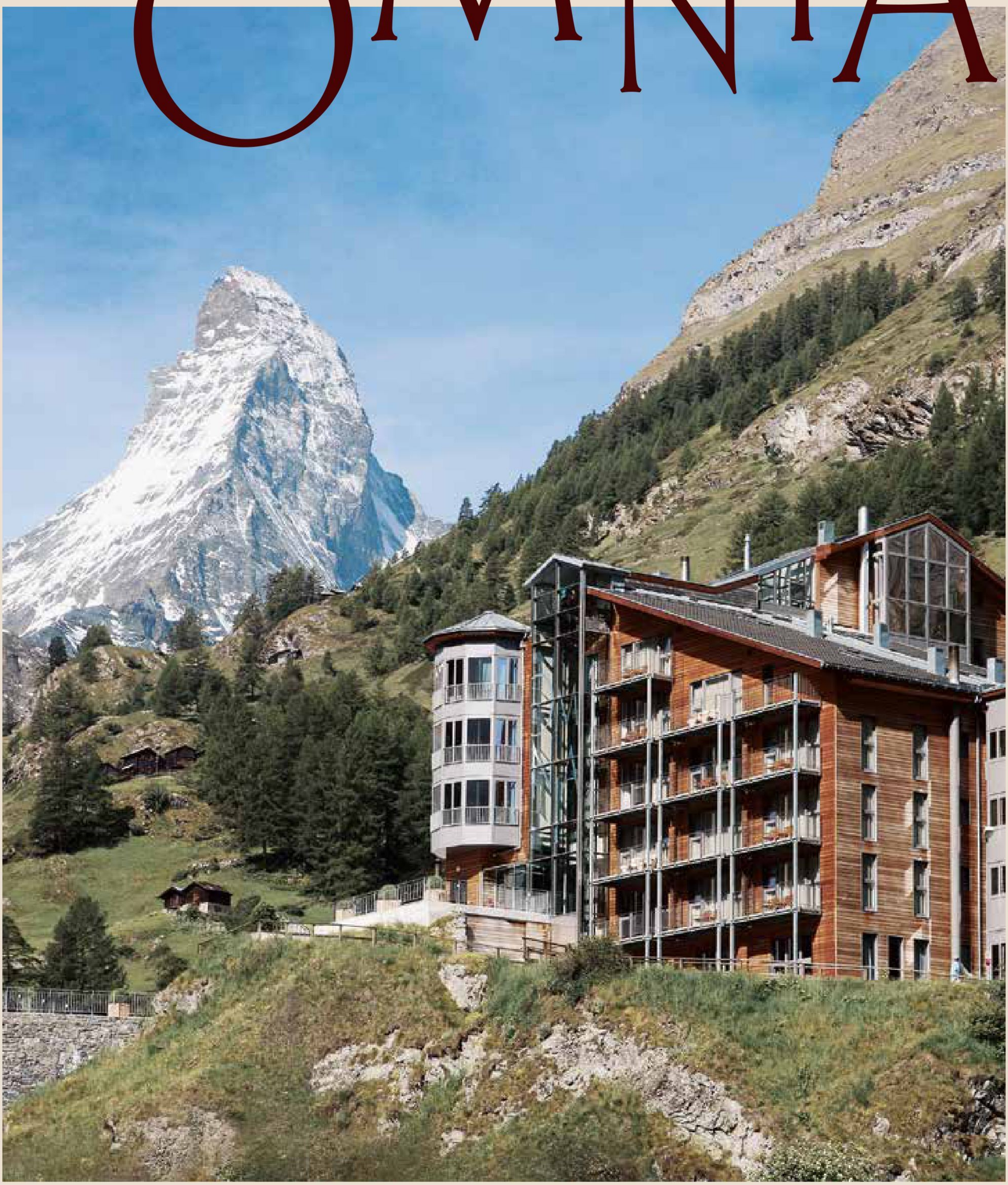

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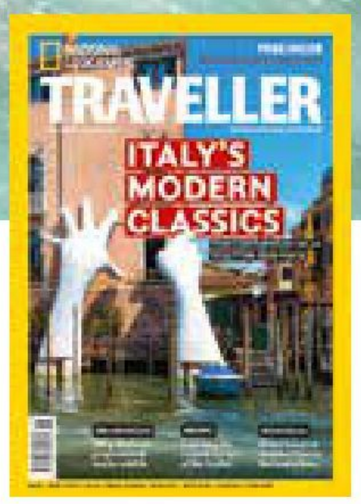

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Lorenzo Quinn's Support sculpture in the Grand Canal, Venice
IMAGE: Getty

IMAGE: GETTY

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IMAGES: GETTY; PIA VERGARA

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Contributors

Julia Buckley

Many of us go to Italy for the history and culture, yet I was amazed to discover some of its innovative design projects. Having private access to a Michelangelo exhibition before breakfast, for example, made for an unforgettable hotel stay. **ITALY P.82**

Jamie Lafferty

I'd been to Nicaragua once before, but mostly saw its volcanos as intimidating silhouettes on the horizon. Going back to study and climb them, as well as peer into their fiery bellies, was an altogether more profound experience. **NICARAGUA P.104**

Adrian Phillips

For years western Hungary lay beneath the watchtowers of the Iron Curtain, and before that its people were proud defenders at the edge of the kingdom. Today's guardians preserve one of Europe's most unspoilt regions. **HUNGARY P.116**

Chris Leadbeater

Beijing has a reputation for austerity; for being big and impressive, but not much fun. However, I realised that like any city that's home to millions of people, China's capital is alive with good shops, great bars and excellent restaurants. **BEIJING P.140**

James Draven

Seattle refuses to be defined by its former glories, yet I found a resurgent '90s vibe there: vintage pinball machines, Nirvana exhibitions and flannel shirts paired with ripped jeans that prove it's still a city where you can come as you are. **SEATTLE P.150**

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Editor's letter

For a country so strongly defined by its history, Italy does an excellent job of merging old and new, past and future. Take Rome's Trevi Fountain, one of the symbols of the capital itself. In 2014, the baroque masterpiece received a multimillion-euro restoration funded by the fashion house Fendi. And while this public-private enterprise is hardly anything new, it demonstrates the close relationship in Italy between its top creative talent and rich heritage.

Meanwhile, over in Venice, a city that's practically a living museum, 20th-century Italian architect Carlo Scarpa embraced the limitations of its historical fabric by melding it with modernism.

In Turin, there are industrial buildings reborn as arts and events spaces, Milan has a 'vertical forest' sprouting from an apartment block, and Genoa's reimagined port district has transformed the city.

From hotels and galleries to concept stores and vineyards, this issue celebrates the cutting-edge creatives behind some of Italy's design classics. Architecture, fashion, furniture, design and art represent modern Italy, while carefully ensuring its past is as relevant as ever.

PAT RIDDELL, EDITOR

@patriddell
@patriddell

HIGHLIGHTS

National Geographic Traveller Food

Issue 5 comes free with this copy — tuck in to everything from vegan cuisine to kebabs

National Geographic Traveller Food Festival

The worlds of food and travel come together for an unforgettable weekend this July (p.16)

Online

Our website's moved to a new home. Log on to *nationalgeographic.co.uk/travel*, where you'll still find our award-winning content (p.56)

Travel Writing Competition 2019

Want to see your name in print? Pens at the ready — entries are now open for our prestigious competition (p.178)

AWARD-WINNING NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELLER

French Travel Media Awards 2019: Best Art & Culture Feature • British Guild of Travel Writers Awards 2018: Best Travel Writer • Travel Media Awards 2018: Consumer Writer of the Year • AITO Travel Writer of the Year Awards 2018: Travel Blogger of the Year • Visit USA Media Awards 2018: Best Consumer Travel Magazine Feature • BSME Talent Awards 2018: Best Designer • LATA Media Awards 2018: Consumer Magazine Feature of the Year • French Travel Media Awards 2018: Best Wine & Gastronomy Feature • NATJA Travel Media Awards 2017: Photography: Overall Excellence — Print Publication • British Travel Awards 2017: Best Consumer Holiday Magazine • British Guild of Travel Writers Awards 2017: Best Travel Writer • British Guild of Travel Writers Awards 2016: Best Travel Writer • British Travel Awards 2015: Best Consumer Holiday Magazine

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EDITORS' PICKS

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HERE'S WHAT THE *NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELLER FOOD* TEAM ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO SEEING — AND TASTING — AT THE FESTIVAL

SCREEN TO STAGE

As a fan of *MasterChef* in all its forms, I'm really excited so many people who've appeared on the show will be taking part in the Festival, including **John Torode**. Having watched these talented chefs and broadcasters on screen, I'm looking forward to seeing them in person as they share their food stories and prepare dishes they love.
Nicola Trup, deputy editor

BIG ON JAPAN

I'm a huge fan of Japanese food, from sashimi to tempura, and I can't wait to watch **Tim Anderson** demonstrate how to make his versions of the classics. He recently shared his tips for perfect California rolls in *National Geographic Traveller Food*, and now I'm hoping he'll reveal how to get ramen just right.
Glen Mutel, editor

JOIN THE Q

I've been keen to hear chef **Josh Katz** speak ever since I ate at his fabulous Middle Eastern restaurant, Berber & Q, in Haggerston. After all, anyone whose food leaves me that happy has certainly got my attention. I'm particularly eager to learn his secret for making the best cauliflower shawarma I've ever had.
Lauren Gamp, designer

GOING GREEK

Greek food is what dreams are made of — well, my dreams, at least. My favourite dish is dolmades: little parcels of lamb, rice and herbs, wrapped in vine leaves, ideally served with a dollop of yoghurt and lemon juice. You'll no doubt find me chomping on these fragrant appetisers at the Greece stand in the exhibition hall.
Farida Zeynalova, assistant editor

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SNAPSHOT

Molly Wickham, British Columbia

For the past five years, Molly Wickham (pictured here in her lynx furs) has been raising her young family on the *yin tah* (the Wet'suwet'en word for 'land') while keeping watch over the waterways that draw canoeists and anglers to this remote corner of northwest British Columbia in Canada. Molly and other indigenous land defenders have actively sought to prevent gas pipeline workers from accessing Gidumt'en territory, land of her mother clan. She invited me to visit her off-grid cabin to see how she lives off the land, working trap lines and adhering to the customs and traditional ways of her clan.

MOE KAFER // PHOTOGRAPHER

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Editors' picks

From cultural highlights to ultra-cool openings, our team have found a few things we'd like to share

BUILDING EXPECTATIONS

Rio de Janeiro is set to be the first UNESCO World Capital of Architecture in 2020. The Brazilian city will host a year of events to showcase existing buildings and new architectural styles. *unesco.org*

JO FLETCHER-CROSS

A liver bird's-eye view

Liverpool's famous Royal Liver Building has opened its doors to the public for the first time. An exhibition exploring its history will feature digital maps and audiovisual displays, and you can visit the 15th-floor observation deck for panoramic views across the city. *rlb360.com* **CONNOR MCGOVERN**

Read all about it

Vending machines dispensing short stories have popped up in London's Canary Wharf. The first in the series of free reads is by author Anthony Horowitz and there are plans to roll the machines out across the UK. *short-edition.com*

TAMSIN WRESSELL

IN NUMBERS

PUERTO RICO'S RECOVERY

370

water filters distributed across the island following 2017's Hurricane Maria

8,865

lbs of medicine and supplies issued to 12 municipalities

151,000

people reached by the humanitarian aid efforts so far

Source: foundationforpuertorico.org

FARIDA ZEYNALOVA

IMAGES: GETTY; O. ALEXANDRE

THREE NEW

sky-high seats

NOD OFF

Booking one of Thomas Cook Airlines' new Sleeper Seats, on selected US flights, turns a row of three seats into a bed with a mattress, pillow, fitted sheet and blanket. *thomascookairlines.com*

KICK BACK

A lounge at 30,000ft? You can get just that with Airbus's 'Settee Corner'. It's more of a sofa than a seat, meaning passengers can recline in style, enjoying the fizz and frills of business class. *airbus.com*

SIT UP

An upright, saddle-like seat has been created by Italian company Aviointeriors. The Skyrider 3.0 boosts capacity by 20% and shrinks legroom to a cosy 23 inches. *aviointeriors.com*

CHARLOTTE WIGRAM-EVANS

BIG PICTURE

Yunnan, China

The Duoyishu Rice Terraces are in a corner of southwest China so remote that I had to take a train, plane, bus and car to get there from Beijing. When I took this shot in April, the fields were full of water after the rainy season. I wanted a high angle to look down on the terraces as they were reflecting the dawn light. My first shoot lacked any people to provide a sense of scale, but then I saw three figures walking through the terraces on their way to work, and realised I had the shot I wanted. **BEN PIPE // PHOTOGRAPHER**

benpipephoto.com
@benpipephotography

Paris

A CHANGE OF SEINE

Is the French capital's watery artery the coolest quartier around? Forget the Left and Right Banks — the Seine itself is the place to be

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Pont Marie; pâté at Ducasse sur Seine; Alain Ducasse's floating restaurant; crowds at Rosa Bonheur

PAINT THE TOWN RED

Cargø

Take a night on the tiles to the next level. The hottest ticket for a soiree-on-Seine, this monthly event spills across three floors of the *Concorde Atlantique*, moored near the Tuileries Palace. Inside it's glitter balls galore, and revellers can dance 'til the small hours to the tunes of local and international DJs. *bateauconcordeatlantique.com bonjourbonsoir.paris*

Get cultural

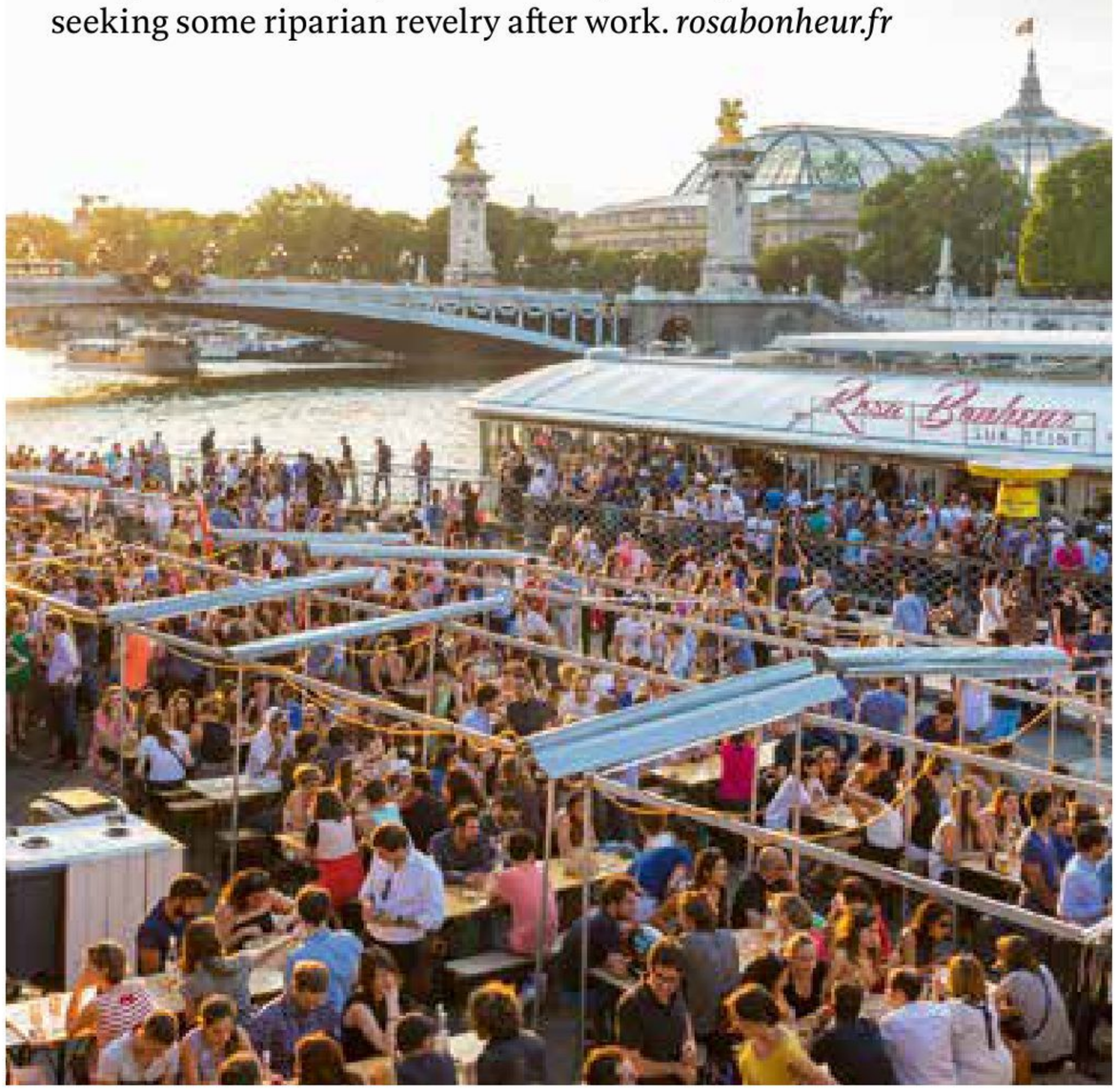
Fluctuart

Paris's stellar set of museums has a brand new addition. Bobbing beside the Pont des Invalides, Fluctuart is set to be the world's first floating museum, showcasing the world of urban art by the likes of Invader and Shepard Fairey. Visitors can explore three floors of exhibition space, as well as a bookshop, bar, workshops and a rooftop balcony. Opens May. *fluctuart.fr*

Make merry

Rosa Bonheur

Inspired by the raucous, good-time vibes of the classic French *guinguette* (tavern), it's all tapas, stone-baked pizzas and live music on board this glass-walled barge. Grab a spot on the terrace for a cold glass of cuvée, if you can — the place is packed with locals seeking some riparian revelry after work. *rosabonheur.fr*



BON APPÉTIT

Ducasse sur Seine

The Seine is the setting for chef extraordinaire Alain Ducasse's floating restaurant, which opened its doors last summer. Diners can expect plates as pretty as Paris itself, from dainty croque monsieur canapes to a chocolate praline dessert, all served against a passing backdrop of landmarks. *ducasse-seine.com*

CONNOR MCGOVERN

IMAGES: GETTY; ALAMY

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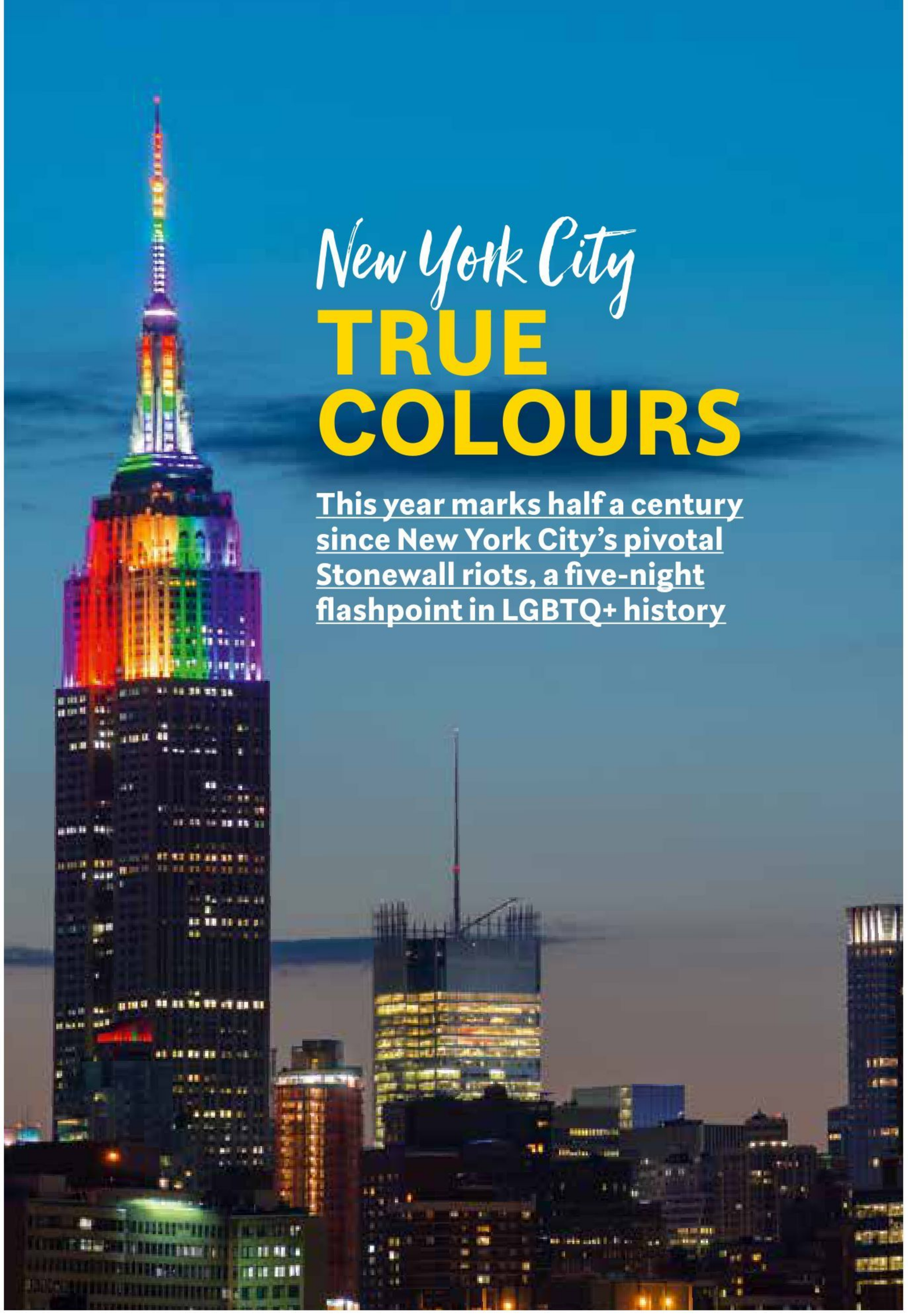

New York City TRUE COLOURS

This year marks half a century since New York City's pivotal Stonewall riots, a five-night flashpoint in LGBTQ+ history

In the early hours of 28 June 1969, in a gay bar on the West Village's Christopher Street, a handful of patrons rose up in defiance against an aggressive police raid. Joined by local residents, these pioneering activists began several nights of demonstrations and riots that led to a national movement, mobilising thousands in the name of gay liberation. This crucible moment at the Stonewall Inn — a gay bar where, like many others in New York and cities across the US, marginalised and criminalised members of the gay community could take refuge and be themselves — was a turning point in LGBTQ+ history.

Five decades on, the world is celebrating those pivotal days in suitably extravagant style. New York City's Pride march, which annually welcomes millions of protestors and partiers, will this year be part of a mammoth, month-long programme. The country is set to host a WorldPride celebration for the first time, and some four million attendees are expected to descend on the Big Apple for the occasion.

So what can revellers expect from an event that's set to be the biggest Pride celebration of all time? There'll be a true rainbow of more than 50 events throughout June, including rallies, parties, club nights, film screenings and lectures, all culminating on 30 June for the parade itself. 1-30 June 2019. *nycpride.org*

Stonewall Forever

This heritage project aims to preserve and share the untold stories of the Stonewall riots. Visitors to the site are invited to add their own piece of history by contributing materials, photos and ephemera from the early years of the LGBTQ+ rights movement; the pieces may then be archived as part of the Stonewall collection at the LGBT Community Center National History Archive, as well as on Google Arts & Culture. *stonewallforever.org*

SARAH BARRELL

IMAGES: GETTY

PICK OF PRIDE

26 & 30 JUNE

WorldPride 2019 opening and closing ceremonies

Celebrating 'millions of moments of Pride', these starry spectaculars on 26 June (Barclays Center, Brooklyn) and 30 June (Times Square, Manhattan) are set to be unmissable highlights among the four weeks of festivities.

28 JUNE

Rally: Stonewall 50 Commemoration

Performances, speakers and more will whip up the crowd at this free event, held at the intersection of Christopher Street and Waverly Place.

21 JUNE

Family Movie Night

Head to Hudson River Park's Pier 45 for a fun-filled family movie night, hosted by drag legend Miss Richfield 1981. All proceeds will go to Heritage of Pride, NYC Pride and other LGBTQ+ organisations.

30 JUNE

Pride March

Hit the streets for the city's most revered Pride celebration. This year's procession will see some 600 groups and 120 floats parade through the West Village.

UNTIL 14 JULY

Love & Resistance: Stonewall 50

The New York Public Library hosts an exhibition of pioneering photographs from Kay Tobin Lahusen and Diana Davies, capturing pivotal moments from the gay rights movement. *nypl.org*

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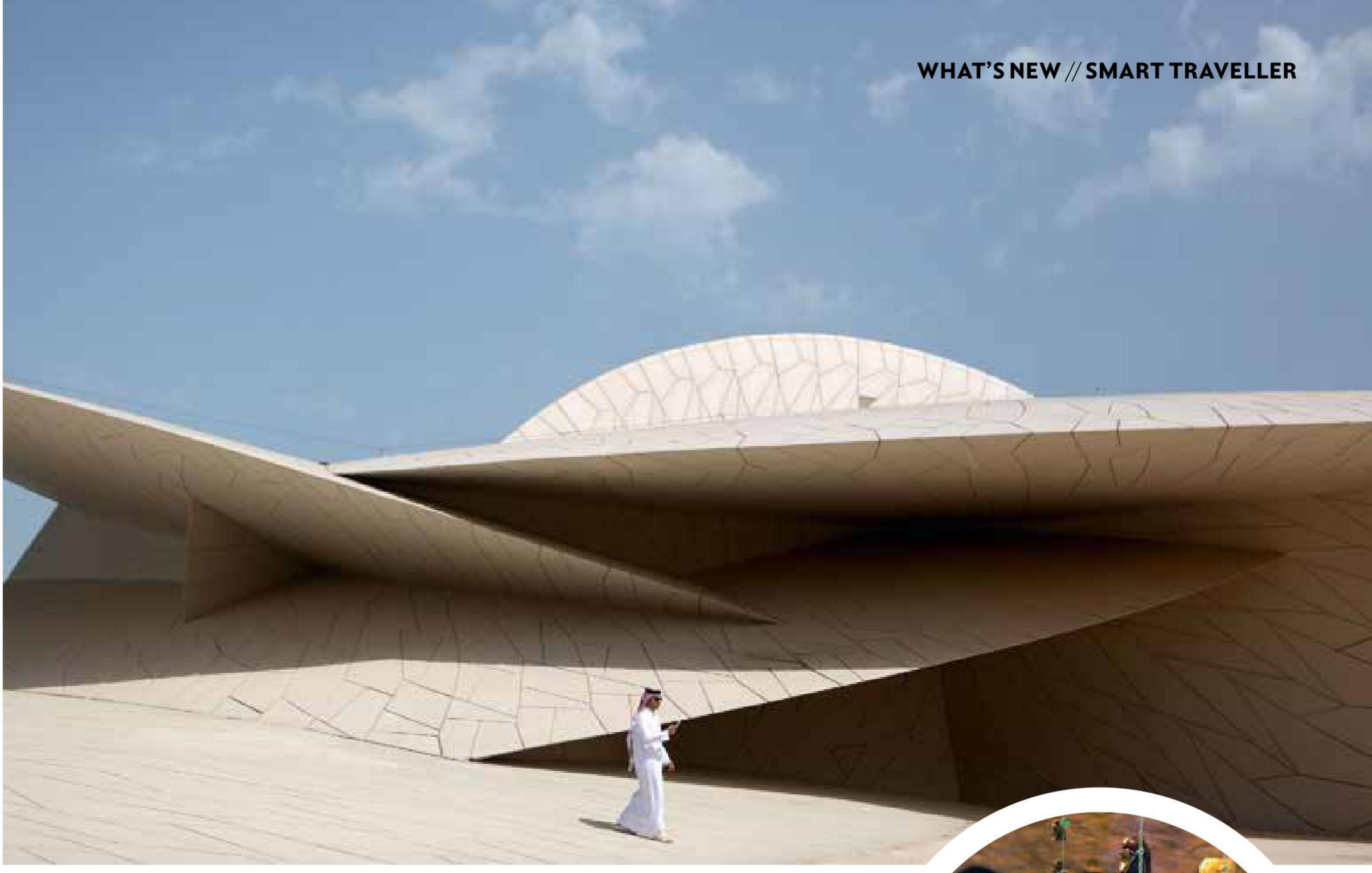

Artistic openings

DESERT ISLAND DISCS

With its out-there architecture, the arrival of Doha's latest attraction has turned heads in the art world

A UFO party in the desert? A heap of oversized crockery? Not quite. According to architect Jean Nouvel, the inspiration behind the new National Museum of Qatar is actually the desert rose, a intricate type of gypsum crystal formed in arid climes. Whatever impressions Doha's all-star attraction gives off, it can easily rival the other recent, extravagant openings in the Middle East in terms of its scale and ambition.

Enveloping a 20th-century palace at its heart, the complex sprawls across 430,000sq ft at the end of the Corniche, and took nearly two decades to conceive and complete.

But architecture aside, it's a bold addition to Qatar's cultural arsenal; an attempt to define the country's identity and celebrate its heritage and future. Inside the cluster of interlocking discs (which cleverly provide pockets of shade), there's a mile's worth of exhibitions that trace the country's past, from desert fossils right up to the exploration of natural gas. Immersive films, animations and galleries are also installed to help bring artefacts and exhibits to life, touching on human topics such as life in the harsh, hostile desert and the waning tradition of pearl fishing. *qm.org.qa* **CONNOR MCGOVERN**

IN NUMBERS

430,000
sq ft of space makes up the new museum in Doha

76,000
panels form the huge angular roof

$434m
(£331m) was the estimated cost of the museum's construction

IMAGES: AFP PHOTO / HO /NATIONAL MUSEUM OF QATAR; KARIM JAAFAR/AFP; GETTY

THREE MORE... MODISH MUSEUMS

WEIMAR
Having shaped much of 20th century design, this year Bauhaus turns 100. To celebrate, the newly opened Bauhaus-Museum Weimar is championing all its ground-breaking modernism. *bauhausmuseumweimar.de*

VENICE
Giudecca will become the Italian city's permanent art district, thanks to its starring role in this year's Biennale (11 May-24 November), when 11 galleries will colour the isle with art. *labiennale.org giudecca-art-district.com*

WINDERMERE
The Windermere Jetty Museum's collection of vessels celebrates the heritage of the region. Most striking, perhaps, is the museum's copper cladding, whose sheen will change with the Cumbrian weather. *windermerejetty.org*

RAFTING

Splashing out

Want to explore the world's most scenic rivers and feel your heart pound? Step aboard a raft and prepare to get wet

Leaving as little trace as possible when travelling is becoming increasingly important, and taking to the water is one of the best ways to explore remote corners responsibly. Most classic rafting trips can be relaxing, with ample chance to spot birds, camp in secluded spots, but others are hair-raisers of an adventure that will get your pulse racing and clothes drenched like nothing else. **SAM LEWIS**

IN TOO DEEP?

The 'Top 10 Endangered Rivers' list identifies rafting rivers threatened by human activity. On it are the Jondachi River in Ecuador and Alaska's Susitna River, which are both threatened by hydroelectric projects; and the Zambezi, whose rapids are at risk from plans for a dam in the Batoka Gorge. *internationalrafting.com*

IN NUMBERS

ZAMBEZI RIVER

1,599
miles long

6
the number of countries through which it flows

355
feet, the height of its most famous feature, Victoria Falls

540,000
square miles, the size of its drainage basin

SEAN CLARKE'S TOP THREE

river's to raft

The chair of British Rafting shares three of his favourite places to raft around the world

TARA RIVER, MONTENEGRO

The second-longest river canyon in the world offers a variety of day and overnight trips, with options for camping, glamping or hotel stays. One-day rafting trips cost from €45 (£39). *raftingmontenegro.com*

AHANSAL RIVER, MOROCCO

The Atlas Mountains are home to some spectacular snow melt rivers that wind through beautiful Berber country. Three days' camping from £525 per person, departing from Marrakech. *rafting.ma*

FUTALEFÚ RIVER, CHILE

High in the Andes, this is the diamond league of rafting, so remember — a wipe out here won't be small. An eight-day multi-adventure tour including rafting and abseiling costs from £3,500. *swoop-patagonia.com*

IMAGES: GETTY; ALAMY; WATERFALL RAFTING CENTER

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Just an Hour from Tokyo, But a World Away

Home to Benten, the legendary dragon-subduing goddess of good fortune, wealth, music and knowledge, for centuries Enoshima has attracted pilgrims from across Japan.

After a day exploring Enoshima's shrines and sampling the fresh local seafood, sink into the outdoor heated pool at Enoshima Island Spa to watch the sunset over Mount Fuji turn the sky into a watercolor painting.

https://enoshimaislandspa.com/

Enospa

A taste of

ST KITTS & NEVIS

St Kitts and Nevis is home to first-rate seafood and a fusion of flavours. Chef Jasmine Francis shares her highlights

What I love about the cuisine of St Kitts and Nevis, especially in the past few years, is the mix of different cultures and cuisines. We have our Kittitian dishes, but we also have everything from Jamaican and Guyanese to Spanish and American foods. We're such a small pair of Caribbean islands yet this is a beautiful and unique place that's blessed with incredible culinary diversity.

JASMINE FRANCIS is the owner and chef of El Fredo's, a restaurant and bar in Basseterre, St Kitts. *facebook.com/elfredosrestaurantandbar*

THE DISHES

GOAT WATER
This rich goat meat stew is thickened with flour and packed with local vegetables such as yams, sweet potatoes, carrots and red beans, as well as breadfruit. It's a local favourite and one of the many traditional Saturday lunch dishes.

STEWED SALTFISH
Served with coconut dumplings and seasoned breadfruit, this is our national dish. It's a tasty blend of vegetables, spices, coconut and salted cod, which has a distinctive flavour. It's an acquired taste, but must be tried at least once.

JOHNNY CAKE
Originally called journey cakes, but known by most as Johnny cakes, these fried balls of dough are sweet and crisp. You'll often find them served as part of a traditional breakfast, with stewed saltfish, hard boiled eggs, lettuce and tomatoes.

WHERE TO EAT

SPRAT NET, BASSETERRE:
This place is about as far from stuffy as it gets, with outdoor tables, regular live music and a fishing boat that's filled with fresh lobsters — the restaurant's motto is 'we only eat the ones we catch'.

MARSHALLS, FRIGATE BAY:
One of the more formal restaurants on the island, Marshalls has a menu that fuses Caribbean and international cuisines, including conch fritters, lobster, escargots and lamb chops. *marshallsdining.com*

LION ROCK, BASSETERRE:
Sunday is beach day, and we like to visit this laid-back, family-owned beach bar. I'm told they make a tempting rum punch, but I usually order the jerk chicken, or any of the seafood items on the menu. This is fresh, authentic Caribbean food that's oozing with flavour. *lionrockbeachbar.shutterfly.com*

IMAGES: ALAMY

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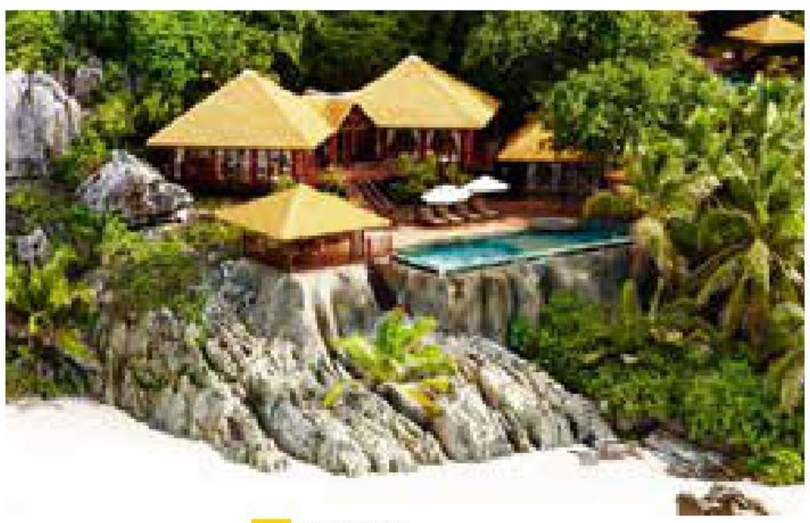

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LEGENDARY LANDMARKS Riga

With its towers, spires and monuments, the architecture of the Latvian capital is steeped in local legend. Words: Farida Zeynalova

1 FREEDOM MONUMENT
You can't miss this 138ft statue, close to Bastejkalna Park, that pays homage to the soldiers killed during the Latvian War of Independence (1918-1920). Funded entirely by local donations, the locals have nicknamed the statue 'Milda', and the three stars she holds represent the three provinces of Latvia.

2 CAT HOUSE
The two copper black cats on the roof of this house on Meistaru Street have become an unofficial emblem of Riga. Apparently, the owner was refused entry to the Great Guild across the road, so placed the cats — omens of bad luck — on the turrets to face the Guild, only turning them around when he was finally accepted.

3 THREE BROTHERS
This picturesque trio of houses in the Old Town is a mini timeline of Riga's architectural styles through the centuries, varying from medieval to baroque. The oldest dwelling in town is number 17, erected in the 15th century. Rumour has it they were built by three brothers, hence the name.

4 HOUSE OF THE BLACKHEADS
Nearby is the former home of the Brotherhood of Blackheads, a fraternity of wealthy, unmarried German merchants. The 13th-century baroque edifice lays claim to the origins of the Christmas tree; it's here a group of men once lugged a pine tree upstairs and adorned it with flowers and candles.

5 ST PETER'S CHURCH
Head over to St Peter's Church. The legend says that when the building collapsed in 1666, and was rebuilt a year later, a shard of glass was thrown from the roof to test its longevity. Instead of shattering into a million pieces (a sign of good luck), it only smashed in half. The tower burnt down the next year.

6 LATVIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
Nicknamed 'Stalin's Birthday Cake', this hulking great behemoth of a building was built for the Soviet leader's birthday, but he died before it was unveiled. Latvia's first skyscraper, it sits in the Moscow District, and its 17th-floor observation deck is open to the public from April to November.

ILLUSTRATION: MARTIN HAAKE

Where to stay

FARO

A sunseekers' favourite, the capital of the Algarve does a surprisingly fine line in pared-back lodgings. Head south to discover Portugal at its rural best

1 MERCEDES COUNTRY HOUSE

What was once a typical Algarve Barrocal country house is today one of the region's loveliest hotels. Opened in 2017, it's a delightfully modern remake of traditional architecture — a twist on that low, blocky, whitewashed Mediterranean look. There's a firm focus on slow tourism, from the building itself (restored using local materials where possible), to the organic restaurant, which serves produce grown in the hotel's orchards and vegetable garden. Traditional doesn't mean rustic here — the style is contemporary without being incongruous, the mottled wood floors and stark white walls offset by modern fittings. The nine bedrooms are large and spacious, and the garden features a large saltwater pool. From £68. *mercedescountryhouse.com*

JULIA BUCKLEY

2 CASA FLOR DE SAL

This former farm, 20 minutes' drive from the city, lies in the Ria Formosa National Park. The once-dilapidated buildings have been beautifully restored, and the grounds include two pools, a natural swimming lake and wild gardens. Houses from £81. *casaflordesal.com*

3 QUINTA DO MARCO

This rural hotel is plonked in the middle of the countryside, offering jaw-dropping views down to the coast. Guests can wander the gardens, take a nap in a hammock or explore the 18-hectare farm. From £56. *hotelquintadomarco.com*

4 LEMON TREE STAY

Opened in 2017, this eight-room guesthouse has small, chic rooms overlooking a courtyard and herb garden in the heart of Faro — but the real highlight is the rooftop terrace with a view over the town. From £59. *facebook.com/lemontreestay*

ALL RATES QUOTED ARE FOR STANDARD DOUBLES, B&B, UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED. IMAGE: GETTY

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New itineraries

ADVENTURES WITH THE FAMILY

Family adventure has never been more popular, and there's a raft of new trips with which to channel your brood's intrepid spirit

FULL-BLOWN IMMERSION
Off the Map Travel's Costa Rica Family Adventure includes a visit to a sloth sanctuary, kayaking and cycling. A sample six-night trip costs from £1,385 per person, based on two adults and two children, B&B. Excludes flights.
BEST FOR: Tailor-made, all ages.
offthemap.travel

FROM COUNTRY TO COAST
Intrepid Travel's Belize & Guatemala Family Holiday features a trip to Belize City, hiking through Tikal National Park and splashing around in jungle pools, not to mention world-class snorkelling on the Belize Barrier Reef. From £1,507 per adult and £1,362 per child for eight days. Excludes flights.
BEST FOR: 5-plus. *intrepidtravel.com*

Wild encounters

An eight-day Kenyan safari represents the ultimate wild escape: drive in Mount Kilimanjaro's shadow, discover the Maasai way of life and learn about elephant conservation with the Kenya Wildlife Service. From £2,422 per person, excluding flights.
BEST FOR: 12-plus. *gadventures.co.uk*

Step back in time

Take the family on an eight-day Egyptian adventure to see the pyramids, travel by boat along the Nile and take a camel ride across the desert. Prices start from £795 per person and include the services of a fully qualified Egyptian tour guide (with a degree in Egyptology). Excludes flights.
BEST FOR: 5-plus. *onthegotours.com*

Urban odyssey

Inside Asia Tours has a 10-day self-guided city adventure to Tokyo and Kyoto, including Tokyo Skytree tickets and a visit to Monkey Park Iwatayama. From £6,230 per family (based on two adults, one teenager and one younger child). Excludes flights.
BEST FOR: 5-plus.
insideasiatours.com

FAMILY ADVENTURE

top tips

SPARK INSPIRATION

Get the little ones thinking about their trip long before you set off by sharing stories about the destination and even trying local cuisine.

THINK POSITIVE

Whether travelling with toddlers or teens, there'll always be challenges, but what adventure is ever plain sailing? Stay upbeat, don't give up and remember that you'll always find a way.

TRY NEW THINGS

New experiences can boost confidence and challenge perspectives. From overcoming a language barrier to trying a new sport, mistakes and successes shape us all, so it's always best for everyone to set off with an open mind.

MARIA PIERI

IMAGES: GETTY; INTREPID TRAVEL

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LIKE A LOCAL

Biarritz

Beloved by surfers and fashionistas alike, the French resort is also a gastronomic gold mine, full of seafood, chocolate and Basque delicacies

Shop 'til you pop

Every shopping escapade should start at the **MARKET HALL**, where you'll find mouth-watering displays of charcuterie, cheese, truffles and foie gras. Join the locals for wine and eat *pinxtos* (Basque tapas) at the stands.

For something more refined, call into the family-run **MAISON AROSTÉGUY**, an enticing *épicerie fine* (gourmet food store), where beautifully arranged shelves are piled high with everything from Espelette pepper, a mild local variety of chilli, to jars of rich fish soup. *arosteguy.com*

Fan of fromage? Wander across the street to **1001 FROMAGES** for the cream of local, Pyrenean and French cheeses. It's not all dairy, however — there's a tempting array of wines, oils and vinegars on offer too. *facebook.com/1001fromages*

Charcuterie's another local obsession, and one of the best places to grab some premium cuts of pork is **PIERRE OTEIZA**. Oteiza is responsible for reintroducing outdoor-reared black Basque pigs to the area. It's the ideal place to fuel up for a picnic, doing a fine line in sausages and pates. *pierreoteiza.com*

Sweet-toothed visitors should indulge in the town's many chocolateries, which maintain the region's proud tradition of chocolate-making. Try **PARIÈS**, which also makes delicious, almondy *gâteaux basques*, or one of the many sweet treats (including the delicious *macarons basques*) from **MAISON ADAM**. *paries.fr maisonadam.fr*

Still hungry?

For sensational seafood, head down to the Port des Pêcheurs, where blue-roofed fishing huts have been converted into restaurants. **CRAMPOTTE 30** — a tiny seasonal restaurant serving delicious plates of *pintxos* and local wines — is a highlight. *T: 00 33 5 40 07 06 52.*

For a real taste of classic Basque cuisine, try **LA TANTINA DE BURGOS**. Punters squeeze into this lively restaurant near the beach for dishes such as roasted duck breast with peaches, or grilled squid and chorizo, all infused with delicate Espelette pepper. *la-tantina-de-burgos-bodega.com*

DON'T MISS
The Braderie de Biarritz, a biannual market where stalls from 150 shops line the streets. *braderiedebiarritz.com*

Book ahead for a table at **LE PIM'PI BISTROT** where chef Manu Michel uses the local produce to exquisite effect. Try and grab a table outside if the sun is out; the streets surrounding the market are great for soaking up the atmosphere. *lepimpi-bistrot.com*

Located right beside the market hall, the **CAFÉ DU COMMERCE** is perfect for watching the world go by — all the while savouring one of the generous sharing platters. *T: 00 33 5 59 41 87 24.*

The town's well known for its surf scene and sea water spas, and a great way to combine the two is brunch at the **SOFITEL BIARRITZ LE MIRAMAR**: it's a heavenly place with superb views out to sea. *sofitel.accorhotels.com*

However, the best views are from the dining room of the splendid **HÔTEL DU PALAIS**, the one-time summer pad of Napoleon III. Tuck in to classic French fare with views of the golden Grande Plage. *hotel-du-palais.com* **CAROLYN BOYD**

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:
Sunset over the Grande Plage; beach tents on the Grande Plage; interior, Maison Arostéguy

IMAGES: 4CORNERS IMAGES; EMMY MARTENS

SARAH DAHAN'S TOP 5

afternoon pit-stops

LE ROYALTY

This good-time bar has a cool, laid-back atmosphere and serves fantastic *chipirons* (sauteed squid) one of the region's favourite dishes. The best place to sit is in the cosy room upstairs, with one of the Moscow mules in hand.
leroyalty.com

HÔTEL DE L'OCÉAN

One of my favourite spots to sip a glass of Champagne is on one of the Chesterfield sofas on the terrace of our Hôtel de l'Océan. It's a great spot to rest your legs after a busy day and to hear the sound of the waves crashing on the rocks below.
biarritz-hotel-ocean.co.uk

LE PASSAGE

Sit outside on the terrace, order a glass of Burgundy and some truffle-infused gouda cheese, and get chatting to the locals on one of the shared tables. I usually hang out here with friends as everyone celebrates the end of their working day. It's everything a lively downtown bar should be.
T: 00 33 5 59 22 12 54.

MILWAUKEE CAFÉ

This is one of Biarritz's most on-trend hang-outs, thanks to the great food. If you're on a detox, go for one of the freshly extracted juices. I often go for brunch on a Sunday and order the pancakes or rye toast and avocado.
facebook.com/milwaukeecafe

MIREMONT

This is a real Biarritz institution. It's full of historic decor and has a sea view that's all the more incredible when the sea is at its wildest. I usually order a *gâteau basque* with cream and sit upstairs because it's quieter. Most people think you don't get the view upstairs, but you do, so make sure you ask. *miremont-biarritz.fr*

Sarah Dahan is the owner of the Hôtel de l'Océan.

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STAY AT HOME

Chipping Norton

This is the gateway to the Cotswolds — a thriving market town of historic pubs and lively local theatre

Why go

With its medieval buildings, antique shops and cosy cafes, Chipping Norton has plenty to keep visitors entertained during an escape to the Cotswolds. But its location in the heart of the rolling green countryside also means it's a perfect jumping-off point for exploring. There's ample opportunity for scenic walks, and within a 20-minute drive, there's award-winning produce at Daylesford Organic Farm; historic, 15th-century pubs like The Falkland Arms; and those iconic, honey-coloured Cotswold villages. *cotswolds.com*

WHAT TO DO

Catch a play (and more) at The Theatre. Famous for its pantomimes, the venue also puts on home-grown plays twice a year, as well as movie screenings and art exhibits. *chippingnortontheatre.com*

Where to stay

Commanding a prime spot on the marketplace, The Fox has been welcoming weary travellers since the 16th century. Rooms are popular at the weekends, so book well in advance. *foxchippingnorton.co.uk*

DON'T MISS

The Rollright Stones are one of Britain's most famous stone circles. Just a 10-minute drive away, some of the Neolithic and Bronze Age megaliths are more than 5,500 years old and have inspired folklore and rituals. *rollrightstones.co.uk*

IMAGES: GETTY

WHERE TO EAT

Wild Thyme serves Mediterranean-inspired British fare using locally sourced, seasonal ingredients. Menus change, but don't skip the decadent cheese souffle if it's available. *wildthymerestaurant.co.uk*

We like

Afternoon tea at The Tea Set is a relaxed affair, far from the stuffy traditions of high tea. It's the perfect pit-stop after a hike in the hills, but if you don't have time for the homemade scones, grab a freshly brewed coffee to take away. *theteaset.co.uk* **MILLIE KERR**

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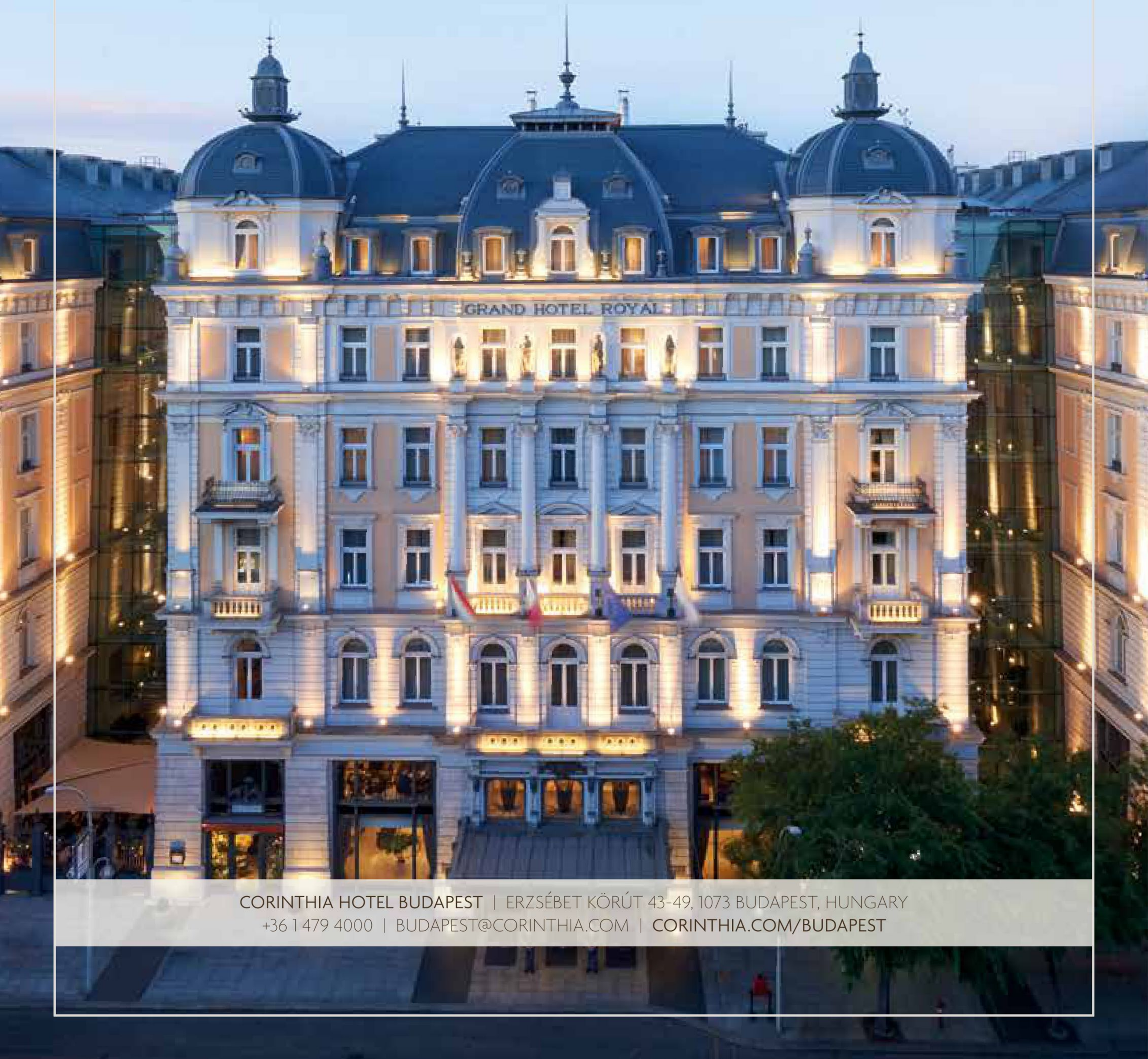

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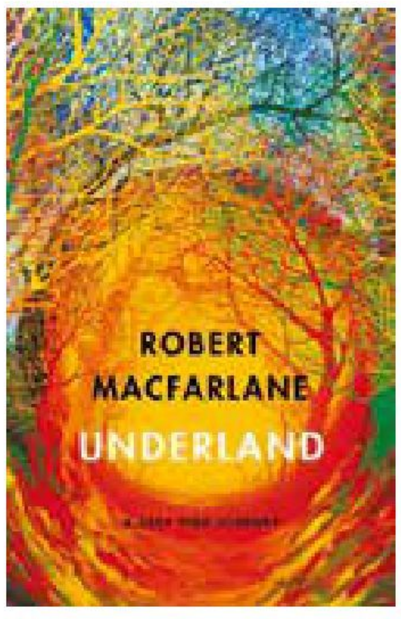
Exploring Earth's subterranean nooks and crannies, Underland is a poetic travelogue that sheds light on the darkest depths of the human condition

"The way into the underland is through the riven trunk of an old ash tree..." So begins a gentle walk that's about as far from pedestrian as a travelogue can get. Like Robert Macfarlane's previous books — such as *Mountains of the Mind*, *The Old Ways* and *Landmarks* — this new offering from the award-winning nature writer explores how we're shaped by the landscapes we move through. It's a travelogue, one that drives into the most crepuscular corners of human existence — a big, brave book that asks the vital question of our time: are we being good ancestors for our descendants here on Earth?



This journey through 'deep time' edges towards the centre of the Earth: into Parisian catacombs, Norwegian sea caves and Bronze Age funeral chambers. It looks at our collective imaginings of the world beneath our feet but is far from a colourful Jules Verne netherworld. Instead, it's a hands-dirty, back-bent descent into compressed, breathtaking places where claustrophobia looms large.

"To understand the light, you first need to have been buried in the deep down dark," says Macfarlane, after fighting a ruckle of boulders in a cave system under the Mendips. This is truer still when he meets a mycologist called Merlin and learns how trees communicate through underground fungal networks.

A host of other experts, including geologists and glaciologists, are roped in, yet the book avoids indulging in too much beard-stroking. But, as Macfarlane admits, *Underland* is a male realm — female explorers are scant, rarely guiding his subterranean story. Instead we're led by such macho seers as the Norwegian fisherman whose blue-grey eyes appear blind at first but, when cod running in the Lofoten Islands, can 'see' the rise and fall of the seabed.

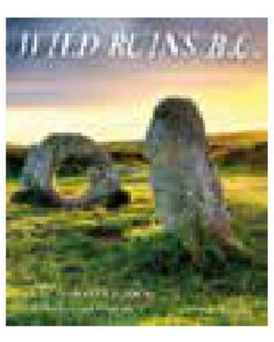
Underland can get abstract while losing itself in the dark in search of an almost Zen-like divinity. It's beautiful nonetheless, making England seem timeless; a place of elder and blackthorn, dragonflies and rosebay willowherbs. Macfarlane's writing is perhaps most sure-footed above ground, however, in his familiar mountain terrain; a poetic odyssey that climaxes towards the book's end when he goes in search of glaciers in Greenland.

Underland speaks to our era's solastalgia — our existential distress at what we're doing to our planet. Is it a retreat underground away from the horrors of the natural world changing irreversibly around us? Yes. But it simultaneously looks at them square on, too. And it can be utterly joyful.

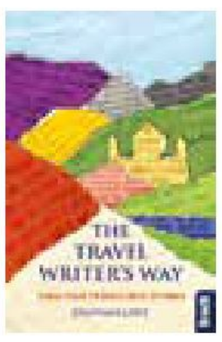
Underland: A Deep Time Journey, by Robert Macfarlane is published by Hamish Hamilton. RRP: £20. **SARAH BARRELL**

WISE WORDS: GET THE GUIDES

THE ROUGH GUIDES TO CROATIA & ICELAND
To mark the final season of *Game of Thrones*, Rough Guides has updated these two guides, with new content pointing readers to featured locations. RRP: £14.99 (APA Publications)



WILD RUINS BC
Take a trip around Britain's crop of prehistoric sites, including ancient axe factories, hidden rock art, lesser-known stone circles, lost villages and temples to the dead. RRP: £16.99 (Wild Things Publishing)



THE TRAVEL WRITER' S WAY
This handbook by Jonathan Lorie is a complete guide to the art of travel writing, with tips and inspirational tales from authors, editors and journalists. RRP: £14.99 (Bradt Guides)
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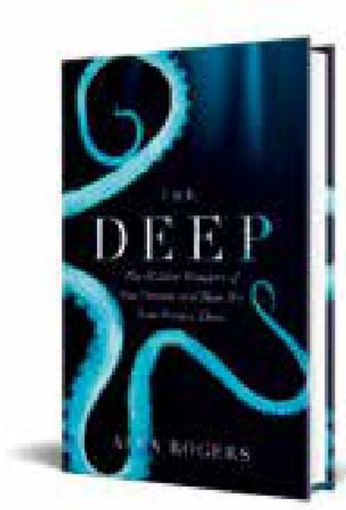

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6 OCTOBER 2019

WHEN: 10.00-18.00

WHERE:
University of Westminster, Marylebone Road, London NW1 5LS

TICKETS: On sale in June

MORE INFO:
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5

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NOTES FROM AN AUTHOR // ELLI H RADINGER

YELLOWSTONE

A chance encounter with wolves in the fabled national park proves a powerful lesson in the relationship between humans and nature

Sometimes people ask me about a special encounter I had with wolves. I can't name a single experience, because during the almost three decades I've been observing them, every wolf sighting has been special. Unforgettable, however, is one moment in Yellowstone National Park.

Early one spring morning, when the road from Mammoth Hot Springs to Old Faithful was cleared for traffic for the first time that year, I drove to Norris Geyser Basin. Norris is one of my favourite places — here, where the earth's crust is only five kilometres thick (normally it's about 50), I feel close to Mother Earth. Yellowstone is a slumbering supervolcano, and Norris is the hottest spot in the park, formed of ice and fire. Sometimes things happen very slowly here — in terms of geological timescales — and sometimes they happen in a flash. It's a place where creation is never ending.

I was sitting on a tree trunk in the middle of gurgling, seething and hissing hot springs. Rivers and streams exhaled clouds of steam among cold fields of snow. In the distance I heard whimpering and screeching sounds. They rose and transformed into a high-pitched laugh, the trill of an operatic diva. Coyotes! My wild friends. They were singing their morning song, their prayer to the sun.

A reply from behind me followed promptly. Deeper, calmer, longer. From a powerful throat. I turned round in slow motion to see a light grey wolf standing only five metres away, staring at me. His ears pricked curiously forward. His tail, slightly raised, showed uncertainty. My camera was on the ground next to me, but I didn't reach for it; that would have broken the spell. I held my breath. Yellow eyes plunged into blue eyes. Seconds, minutes. Then a bird flew up and startled me. The wolf took a step back, turned around and ran off, while I sat there in awe for a long time.

For many people, the creatures of Yellowstone — wolves, bears, cougars — are a symbol of the wilderness. They long to see them, and think a landscape without wolves is a landscape missing something. In our somewhat superficial times, wolves are something real; they represent life and death. Real nature without fences between us.

ILLUSTRATION: JACQUI OAKLEY

There are no longer very many places where you can experience wild creatures in such a way, but Yellowstone is one such place. This elemental land of fire and ice can heal our souls. I've found comfort in the wilderness of Yellowstone many times. It's a place where I can touch 50 million-year-old petrified trees, and walk with the knowledge that beneath me, a huge chamber of glowing magma seethes. I feel tiny. Not insignificant — but on the contrary. Here I can see myself as part of the whole, as part of the big plan of things. It's this realisation that gives me a deep feeling of peace.

Why do we seek comfort in nature? Why do we feel so good when we see, hear, smell or feel animals? When we look at a tree and smell the scent of flowers? When we watch a rushing river or a calm sea?

Outside in nature, I'm never alone, and I never feel lonely. When I take a moment to myself and sit on my favourite hill, then look out over the Lamar Valley, I sometimes catch my breath at the sight of so much magnificence. There's a timelessness in extreme beauty. The present doesn't disappear; it becomes eternity. We need such experiences to learn to be at home in our lives, to feel what it's like to be alive.

Wolves and the wilderness lead us to the existential spiritual questions. Who am I? Why am I here? What's the meaning of life? We sense in us a spark of the divine that all animals carry within themselves. But wolves don't ask those questions — they aren't interested in whether they're our spirit animals or not, if we want to build an altar to them, or whether we hate them. They aren't even interested in whether we exist or not. We're just a part of their environment, to which they adapt.

Perhaps that's their greatest gift to us: that insignificance and unimportance of humans. Perhaps we need to show greater humility and modesty in our response to nature. It's time for us to stop taking ourselves so seriously, and just be. It's only then that we'll be closer to wolves than we've ever been.

"I've found comfort in the wilderness of Yellowstone many times. I feel tiny. Not insignificant — but on the contrary. Here I can see myself as part of the whole, as part of the big plan of things. It's this realisation that gives me a deep feeling of peace

Elli H Radinger is the author of *The Wisdom of Wolves*, published by Michael Joseph. RRP: £14.99.
elli-radinger.de

VIEW FROM THE USA // AARON MILLAR

X MARKS THE SPOT

At the Desert X art festival in Palm Springs, the arid landscape and the installations it frames merge to challenge the viewer's world view

Desert X is the coolest contemporary art event in America. Set across 50sq miles of the Greater Palm Springs area, two hours west of Los Angeles, the biennial outdoor festival offers art nerds an experience akin to geocaching. With the aid of a map and an app, you set off across the stark red desert of the Coachella Valley on a kind of giant scavenger hunt to find enormous sculptures scattered like eccentric treasures blown in on the breeze.

Best of all, it happens in one of my favourite places. Palm Springs is like LA without the traffic and ego — palm trees and modernist mansions everywhere, surrounded by sunburnt, jagged peaks stained ochre and orange. What could be better, I thought, than combining the world's greatest artists with one of the country's most beautiful spots?

There was just one problem: I don't 'get' contemporary art — you know, the pretentious kind: sculptures of prehistoric goats made out of old ironing boards and such. I want to like it. I've paid my admission fee, I've tilted my head, I've squinted my eyes. But I can't shake the feeling that it's only art by the thinnest of margins. I came to Palm Springs to be convinced otherwise.

It didn't start well. First, there was Mosquito Net, a collection of avant-garde statues wading in the water of the Salton Sea, 50 miles south west of the city: a shark with a bunny on its back; a chameleon with a pair of nylon tights; an octopus coming out of a woman's rear end like some kind of hideous, eight-legged fart. In the brochure: 'a bestiary of the ancient and the modern, the sacred and the profane collaged into a landscape of both hope and despair'. But in reality, an octo-butt.

Then there was Halter, an abandoned, graffiti-ridden petrol station with, well, with nothing. Apparently, some rope had been hung somewhere to 'reframe the building's relationship to itself', but I couldn't find it. I wandered around, poked my head through broken windows and tried my very best to see how the artist was using 'material as gesture', how what appeared to be a real-life homeless squat could be 'evocative of an unfastened garment, an open tent, an umbrella', but saw only a meth den and nonsense. It turns out if you disappear far enough up your own backside you end up at an abandoned filling station on the outskirts of Palm Springs.

Gradually, however, I started to get it. Yes, Specter, was, on one level, just an oversized, fluorescent-orange block resembling a giant LEGO piece lost somewhere on the eastern edge of the valley. But it was also undeniably striking, as if Photoshopped into the desert itself, something out of place, and yet surprisingly fitting too. Looking like a weird children's playground piece, Lover's Rainbow was just a painted rebar arch. But looked at from just the right angle, with the snow-capped hills and setting sun behind, it became startlingly, strangely beautiful.

But my favourite was Western Flag: a 30ft-tall square block in the middle of nowhere — something alien and bizarre, like one of the monoliths from the film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. On one side was a giant digital reimagining of the 'Lucas Gusher' of 1901 (the first major oil discovery of the Texas oil boom), dark liquid spewing like a fluttering flag from a pipe stuck in the ground. Behind the installation, stretching as far as the eye can see, is a field of bright white wind turbines, spinning like ballerinas.

With Desert X, the landscape is both the frame and the canvas. Art and nature merge together to create something new and symbiotic — at its best, something greater and profound.

I still don't 'get' all contemporary art. You won't find me hanging any octo-butts on my walls any time soon, but I think I understand it better. All art needs to do in order to justify itself is challenge us to see the world differently. It doesn't matter what the object of art is, because the real canvas is in our imagination. Or as my prehistoric goat ironing board friends might say: we are both the viewer and the work. So, squint hard — the world may be more beautiful than you think. *visitgreaterpalmsprings.com*

British travel writer Aaron Millar ran away from London in 2013 and has been hiding out in the Rocky Mountains of Boulder, Colorado ever since.
@AaronMWriter

ILLUSTRATION: JACQUI OAKLEY

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FROM THE WEBSITE

BEYOND THE HYPE

Famed for its intricate soup dumplings, Din Tai Fung caused a stir when it first launched in the UK with a branch in London's Covent Garden. But does it live up to expectations?

The first thing you see when you enter Din Tai Fung is a glass-walled laboratory, full of uniformed workers wearing surgical masks — each one a highly skilled yet faceless cog in the restaurant's dumpling production line. It's an arresting sight; it makes me feel a bit like I'm James Bond and I've just broken into the lair of my nemesis.

Seeing food produced this way shouldn't be a big deal — after all, teamwork is at the heart of all successful kitchens. But to have the mechanics of it laid bare like this wrong-foots me slightly. And it's by no means the only thing about Din Tai Fung I find surprising. Our orders, for example, are communicated by ticking boxes on a form. Which is fine, when your needs are straightforward, but less so when they can't be expressed by a tick — on which occasions, my dining companion and I find ourselves explaining them several times to slightly panicked waiting staff.

Not that this really matters. The food is served up lightning-fast, and the whole charade is quite fun. What matters far more is the imminent promise of *xiao long bao*, those exquisite little soup dumplings upon which Din Tai Fung's gilded reputation rests. Having had them just once before, I'm understandably excited, and when they arrive, each one pinched into 18 impeccable folds, they're production-line perfect.

Remembering the advice of food writer Fiona Sims, I nibble the top of one to let the steam escape, drink a bit of the pork broth within, and then scoff the rest. At which point, I find myself briefly transported back to my gran's kitchen on Boxing Day (she'd always slow-cook a leg of pork to accompany the Christmas turkey). Hungry for more umami nostalgia, I devour another one near whole, and promptly scald the inside of my mouth.

Of course, *xiao long bao* aren't the only thing on the menu; the prawn and pork *shao mai* look like loosely tied swag bags, the meaty flavours within similarly evocative of winter meals, while the soft skins of the pork-and-vegetable wontons easily give way to reveal a gentle kick of chilli and vinegar. By now, you may be sensing a porky theme to proceedings. Not wanting to quite go the whole hog myself, I also find room for some garlicky greens (*nai bai*), plus a bowl of noodle soup, which tastes like a wondrously subtle casserole, due to the welcome lump of braised beef bathing within.

When our savoury dishes are gone, I experience the contentment of one who has ordered wisely. It's not that any single dish has completely rocked my world — I feel more as though I've just enjoyed an excellent buffet. It's all great sharing food, which is appropriate, as this branch of Din Tai Fung feels like quite a social space. It's large, busy and very informal, something my fellow diners appear to be relishing. And, for all the pre-launch hype, it feels to me more like a treasured casual haunt than a venue for a special occasion. In fact, I can even imagine bringing my children here. As someone who's been vigorously shushed in a Michelin-starred restaurant for the crime of laughing, this feels quite refreshing.

For dessert, the *xiao long bao* are back, their intricately wrought casings this time filled with a mixture of chocolate and red bean, which has a doughy quality, like the cake mix a child might lick from a bowl. After which, there's just time for a few delicate, sweet sesame buns, and the last half-hearted sips of my palate-expanding Taiwanese cocktail, then I'm back past the mass of masked minions, and out onto the rain-slicked streets of London. On the train home, I find myself wishing that Din Tai Fung was five minutes from my house. Or that I somehow lived in Covent Garden.

GLEN MUTEL

IMAGES: CHARLIE MCKAY; GETTY; TARA FISHER; AWL IMAGES; ALAMY; HARRY SKEGGS

MOST READ

From hyenas in Botswana to the creative *quartiers* of Lille, here's what you've been reading online this month

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How Instagram is changing the way we travel

The photo-sharing platform has shaken up how we see the world

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How to make it: Hungarian goulash

A modern take on the classic stew of meat and vegetables

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Xiao long bao
BELOW: Din Tai Fung interior

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Weekender

FAROE ISLANDS

A culinary capital out in the North Atlantic, this is a land of sheep, fog and epic landscapes that offers an adventurous escape. **WORDS:** *Josephine Price*

Little changes on the Faroe Islands. This far-flung, self-governing archipelago, part of the Kingdom of Denmark, rises out of the Atlantic between Scotland, Norway and Iceland, and prides itself on maintaining traditions. Just 18 small islands make up this nation; 18 lumps of volcanic rock cloaked in emerald green where rugged coastlines and soaring cliffs enclose hidden lakes, precipitous mountains and tight-knit communities.

The Faroe Islands may stand still in some ways, but in others, it soars ahead, mustering a reputation as a pioneering member of the Nordic dining pack. From Michelin stars in hidden valleys and sushi spots in the city to traditional cooking in the homes of locals, the scale and range of cuisine on offer is impressive for such a small place.

Its culinary advancements, natural bounty and dreamy backdrop invoke pride without arrogance. Life can be tough in the Faroes. Isolated, rugged, treeless and open to the elements, it's a place where myths and folklore live on, and where sheep outnumber people.

It's also a place where knitting is still a part of everyday life — you'll find wool has its own aisle in the supermarket. Known as the 'gold of the Faroes' in local proverbs, this wool once clothed the Danish army. More recently, it made a recurring appearance in the hit Scandi noir drama *The Killing*. Those plentiful sheep make their way onto plates, too: fermented, cured, roasted, boiled. And though the Faroe Islands are a firm fixture on the international foodie radar, this is a destination that's much more than a culinary escape. Make it your next adventure.

FAROESE FOOD FINDS

For Michelin stars

KOKS: The experience starts with an aperitif in a former smokehouse; next a 4X4 takes you deeper into the valley before you settle into the cosy restaurant for the main event. *koks.fo*

For capital city dining

SKEIVA PAKKHÚS: Tórshavn's latest restaurant has gained a reputation with interesting plates such as pickled cod, brown butter and pumpkin seeds. *skeivapakkhus.fo*

For local flavour

HEIMABLÍDNI: This means 'home hospitality' in Faroese — think supper clubs with locals. Visit Harriet and John on Eysturoy island for traditional Sunday lunches. *hanusarstova.com*

IMAGES: LAVUR FREDERIKSEN; KOKS RESTAURANT; INGRID HOFSTRA; SHAWN OGULU; RENEE HAHNEL; OLAFSDÓTTIR

Don't miss

The Múlafossur Waterfall in Gásadalur. The tunnel to this remote village only opened in 2004 — before that, it required a demanding hike over the mountain. Look out for puffins while admiring the waterfall, then stop for home-cured fare at Cafe Fjorooy.

VANTAGE POINT

The trek up to Lake Sørvágsvatn is renowned, and for good reason. Paths are easy to follow, not too arduous and the iconic view at the end is both beautiful and mind-boggling — it delivers an optical illusion of the body of water hovering miraculously on a clifftop above the sea.

ISLAND HOPPING

Catch the twice-daily ferry from Tórshavn to Nólsoy. The 20-minute journey heads from the tiny yet buzzing capital to a quirky island with few cars and plenty of characters. Stop for home-cooked food, local beer, and great G&Ts at Gimburlombini. *facebook.com/gimburlombini*

EYEWITNESS

THE END OF THE LINE

"I first did this when I was about 10 with my father, and I've done it every year since," says Johannes as we edge up the slippery, mossy hill. I know there's a sharp drop ahead, but the island's fabled fog has set in and visibility is poor, to say the least.

Abseiling is a bit of a thing in the Faroe Islands. Like many activities on these remote islands, its origins lie not in thrill-seeking adventurers, but in tales of survival. The archipelago's rugged landscape may invite the intrepid traveller, but these pursuits are steeped in local tradition. For centuries, abseiling was part of life as islanders lowered themselves over cliff edges on ropes woven from sheep's wool to seek out prized puffin eggs. Dwindling supplies halted the act and saved the puffins, but the act of abseiling remains very much entrenched in island life for those daring enough to tackle the vertical descents. And with such a selection of sheer cliffs, sea stacks and dramatic gorges, it would seem a pity not to give it a go while I'm here. Or, at least, that's what I thought yesterday.

My stomach lurches when I see the drop. Below me tumbles a rocky, mossy ravine. The gorge is plucked straight from the pages of a Tolkien novel. Yesterday's downpour has transformed every crevasse into the source of a new waterfall. Emerald green and jet black rock shimmers beneath.

As we stand on the gorge's snared edge, the fog starts to clear. Johannes sets up the ropes in a matter of minutes. With practice comes dexterity. He's done this thousands of times. Johannes was born here on Vágur, the island with the Faroes' one airport and some of its most remote hiking destinations. His days are filled with hiking, abseiling, climbing and camping. Under his instruction, I buckle up and edge backwards towards the drop. I tentatively cross over the edge and walk myself out until I'm parallel with the cliff and start to walk my way down.

I slip on the next craggy, moss-covered foot hole. I'm blinded by fear for a moment or two, then I pause and remember to breathe as I regain my balance. These cliffs are unyielding and unfriendly. But this is the Faroe Islands. It's in this drama and seemingly unfriendly landscape that you discover the islands' beauty.

I let the rope out slowly. It's exhilarating and I'm not sure I want this to end. At the bottom I unbuckle and shout up to indicate the all clear. I've got a moment to myself to take in the gorge once again. But Johannes is down in less than that. He's done this many times before. *reika.fo*

Go wild

REMOTE ESCAPES

Reika Adventures is a one-man band taking travellers to the Faroes' isolated corners. Try wild camping by the archipelago's most remote lake where you'll fish for your dinner. If this isn't fruitful, Reika's Johannes Hansen offers up dried cod and locally brewed beers round the campfire. *reika.fo*

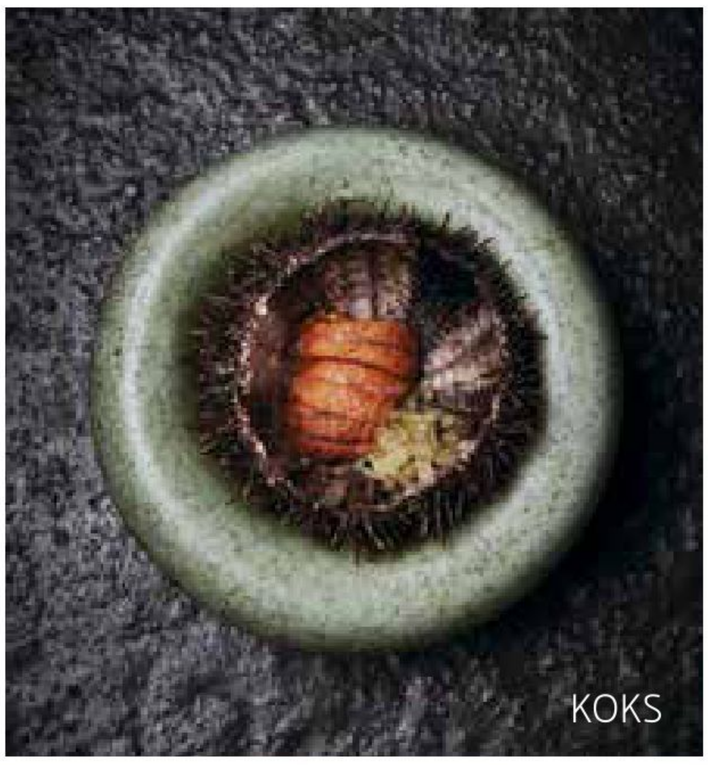
HIT THE ROAD

Hire a car and make your way across the islands — six of the 18 are accessible by road. Follow the signposted 'buttercup routes' (named after the national flower) for scenic trails up and over the mountaintops. Gjógv and Saksun are the must-see villages. For those that don't drive, join the hitchhikers (they're a common sight) or catch one of the local buses — although be warned they're fairly infrequent.

The only direct flights from the UK to the Faroe Islands are from Edinburgh, with Atlantic Airways. Travel from other UK airports requires a connecting flight in either Denmark or Iceland. *atlantic.fo*
visitfaroeislands.com

IMAGE: REIKA ADVENTURES

Sleeping & Eating in the Faroe Islands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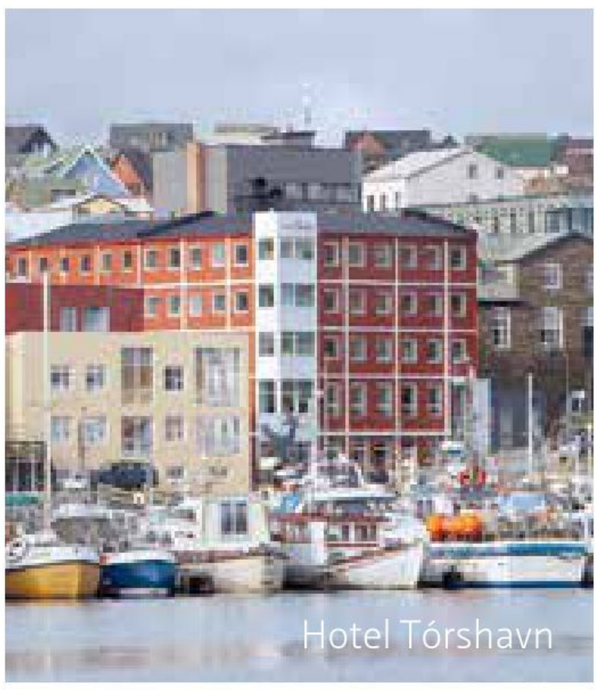
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Eat

MONTREAL

A strong Jewish influence is writ large across Montreal's cuisine with old-school bakeries and diners alongside young upstarts putting a fresh spin on the classics. Words: Nina Caplan

The vexed question of the bagel has preoccupied North America for more than a century; when boiled (and it must be boiled, everyone agrees on that) down to essentials, it's a matter of identity. Which is more sophisticated: big and fluffy New York, or chewy, slightly sweet Montreal, with its egg and honey-water dough? There's a light dusting of irony in the fact that both varieties of bagel arrived on the continent with Jewish refugees from Russian pogroms, who would have held few claims to sophistication. But the underlying issue is an anxious and piercingly relevant one: how much should a migrant culture change?

If you wander the leafy (or, in winter, snowbound) streets of Montreal's Mile End, you may become convinced that some cultures don't change at all. The Hasidim, ultra-Orthodox Jews, have bushy beards, temple ringlets and high black homburgs; sometimes, wonderfully, they wear *shtreimels* (round fur hats), and speak Yiddish. To me, whose mother refused to teach Yiddish ("a dying language"), that may be the most wonderful aspect of all.

Looking at the Hasidim, you might believe the myth that Judaism survives by stubbornly refusing to evolve. However, the Jewish food of Montreal tells a different story. The so-called traditional dishes — bagels and smoked meat, the delectably greasy, brined brisket that's cousin to pastrami — only arrived with the Eastern European Ashkenazim Jews in the 1900s, but the city has had a community since the 18th century, and those Sephardim (Jews whose antecedents travelled from Spain to north Africa and the Levant) eat very differently. If my family's culinary background features the kind of hefty, unaesthetic stodge so often associated with Eastern European cuisine, my Sephardi friends can boast saffron and pomegranate, parsley and red peppers: flavours and colours that bloom in sunlight.

There have been other changes. Montreal's purveyors of traditional Jewish food aren't Orthodox; these days, many aren't even Jewish. The Berenholc family still run Lester's Deli, with its crazy selection of *tchotchkes* (ornaments and collectibles, irresistible to dust) but Schwartz's Deli, a

ABOVE: Hummus platter at Falafel Yoni; outside St-Viateur Bagel Shop

IMAGE: TOURISME MONTRÉAL

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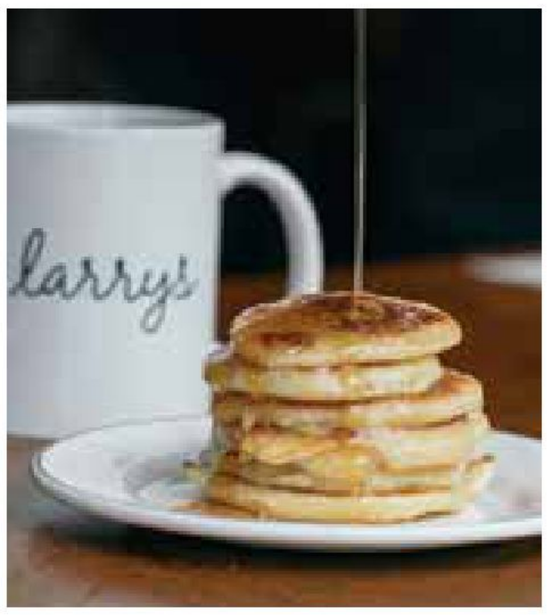
A TASTE OF
Montreal



LE VIN PAPILLON
Getting a table at Montreal landmark Joe Beef is never easy, but its sister restaurant two doors down doesn't take reservations, so if you're willing to queue you might be in luck. Come hungry, thirsty and loaded, as the dishes such as endive rarebit and smoked sturgeon gnocchi, plus the exceptional wine list, can lead to a hefty bill. Don't expect change from C$100 (£60) per person for a few small plates, drinks and tip.
vinpapillon.com

LARRY'S BAR
Part of the same family of establishments as Boucherie Lawrence, one of the best butchers in the city, Larry's specialises in small plates, good wine and excellent beers from Montreal's thriving microbrewery scene. The food has a hint of the Middle East — celery root with preserved lemon, Jerusalem artichoke with za'atar — but there are also terrines, rillettes and charcuterie. A couple of plates and a glass of wine cost about C$50 (£30) with tip.
lawrencemtl.com/larrys

LESTER'S DELI
With its Coca-Cola memorabilia, clippings of interviews with lifelong fan Jackie Mason and lunch boxes decorated with forgotten TV series, old-school Jewish establishment Lester's has to be seen to be believed. There's great smoked meat, as a glance at the old men mixing with the hip young things around you will confirm. A smoked meat sandwich with sides and a beer comes to about C$30 (£17.50) with tip.
lestersdeli.com

IMAGES: MICKAEL A. BANDASSAK

Montreal smoked meat institution so famous that tourists queue for their opportunity to take one delicious, saltpetre-pink step closer to a heart attack, is now part-owned by Celine Dion. At Wilensky's, immortalised by Mordecai Richler in the novel *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, Moe's daughter Sharon Wilensky still makes their famous salami and bologna sandwiches, but her mother Ruth died last March, aged 98. Meanwhile, Hymie Sckolnick, ever-present founder of Beauty's Luncheonette, passed away in 2017, at 96.

Of the two great bagel joints — their wood-ovens fired up 24 hours a day, 365 days a year — St-Viateur, opened in 1957 by a Holocaust survivor, now belongs to Italians, although the Schlafman family still owns Fairmount. Every Montrealer, Jewish or gentile, has their preference; even frequent visitors do (Fairmount, since you ask. Every time). And of course, they'll all unite against the scorned New York bagel. Montreal, a city of two principal cultures, capital of a province that views itself as a Francophone island in an English-speaking, neo-American sea, is really, really good at rivalry. No wonder the Jews, with our proud tradition of never agreeing on anything, feel at home.

Some have even begun to remake that home's gastronomy. Raegan Steinberg and her husband, Alex Cohen, opened Arthurs Nosh Bar in the Saint-Henri quarter in 2016. Their freewheeling dishes blend tradition (cream cheese schmear, Fairmount bagels) with modernity, including that essential modern ingredient: artisanship. So there's smashed avocado on toast, but scrambled eggs come with a *latke* (potato pancake) and kosher salami. Alex's Sephardi background inspires weekend dishes like shak (shakshuka), featuring salsa and tahini, and Moroccan toast (poached egg and marinated aubergine on challah with spiced chickpeas), but weekdays belong to the Ashkenazim.

Raegan's family, the Steinbergs, were legendary grocers until the company failed in the 1990s. She named this joint for her father, who died of cancer aged 56, and we talk much-missed fathers: mine, a *fresser* (enthusiastic eater) would have loved Arthurs. This was supposed to be a catering operation, Alex says, gesturing around the white-tiled walls and closely packed, marble-topped tables. Plenty of doubts were aired when they changed tack: "You're opening a Jewish restaurant in Montreal? Are you crazy?" Still, Arthurs, which doesn't take reservations, has become so popular queues wind out the door on weekends, and Alex dreams of opening in cities across the globe.

Just 10 minutes' walk on Notre-Dame Street West, warm lighting sets off the pale wood and exposed brick at Sumac, which focuses on traditional Sephardi dishes. This place is casual, with a menu board and counter service. The falafel are crisp and moist, the red cabbage crunchy, the pita baked in the

LEFT: Pancakes, Larry's; Arthurs Nosh Bar

Daniel Maislin and Yoni Amir
RIGHT: Smoked meat sandwich, Schwartz's Deli

premises' oven and Middle Eastern seeds and spices are used liberally (chef Raquel Zagury's father is Moroccan). Portions are, frankly, enormous. The *fressers* at the next table live across the road; sheepishly they admit to eating here at least twice a week.

Another crop of new Jewish restaurants clusters about the street that bisects Montreal: Saint Laurent Boulevard, known as the Main. A block away, childhood friends Daniel Maislin and Yoni Amir have opened tiny Falafel Yoni. There's no licence — in fact legally, no restaurant: they're operating on a grocery permit. But the pair have a cool, stripped-back space and a correspondingly simple menu: falafel in pita or salad, *sabich* (an Israeli pita sandwich with aubergine, tahini and eggs) and chips. Spicy sauce if desired, although it's not that spicy.

The ingredients overflow; if there's one theme common to all these eateries, it's the fear that your guest may leave hungry. Everything here is vegan except the egg in the sabich, and Yoni, who was born in Israel, agrees that the tap in the middle of the restaurant references the Jewish obligation to wash one's hands before eating; but motivation is aesthetic rather than religious. The family really can't be *frum* (Orthodox) though: Yoni's sister Sefi is co-owner of the superb Boucherie Lawrence, where the pork is all local — but it's still pork.

Just above Mount Royal Avenue you'll find Jeffrey Finkelstein's airy bakery Hof Kelsten. Having worked at some of North America's best restaurants, Jeffrey chose to return to his roots: the Jewish baked treats he remembers from childhood. At his place you can pick up rye bread and Friday challah, or stay for a Danish pastry or bowl of borscht.

Yet, not everyone can be said to be returning to their roots. Kat Romanow was born Italian-Catholic and discovered Judaism as an undergraduate, so she's now converting. She runs a pop-up restaurant, The Wandering Chew, and is also director of food programming at the Museum of Jewish Montreal, which is mostly virtual — it runs excellent tours, delving into the city's thorny history of immigration and exploitation.

The museum's adjoining cafe, Espace Culinaire Fletchers, serves truly innovative dishes born from Kat's determination to remedy the inexplicable lack of crossover between Jewish and Québécois food. The sababa salad glows with kale and za'atar-roasted cauliflower, while the gefilte fish tacos make inventive use of the traditional pallid moulded fish patties that taste good, but will never win a beauty pageant. "We're trying to show that Jews eat really well — even the Ashkenazim," says Kat proudly.

I'm out of time, but not out of options; Yoni tells me there's even a kosher Chinese ("Is that a good idea?" I ask. He shrugs). Still, one outlier deserves a mention. Joe Beef, a 19th-century Irish-Canadian tavern owner, wasn't Jewish, and nor are Fred Morin and David MacMillan, who named their original restaurant for him and now own a group of world-beating Montreal eateries. Raegan Steinberg, Alex Cohen and Jeffrey Finkelstein have all worked at Joe Beef; Hof Kelsten supplies their bread; and the most innovative neo-Jewish dish I've ever tasted is David MacMillan's smoked-meat croquette. That blend of old and new, Jewish and gentile, French and English, thick skin and tender centre, is quintessential Montreal. And it's delicious.

Five Montreal food finds

1

CLAMATO JUICE
This blend of tomato and clam juice is definitely not kosher, but it's an essential ingredient in the caesar, the local (and in my view, improved) version of the bloody mary.

2

FAIRMOUNT BAGELS
Hand-rolled and boiled in honey-water, they're best eaten warm and chewy, straight from the wood-fired oven, day or night.

3

SMOKED MEAT SANDWICHES
With varying amounts of mustard, local coleslaw, pickle (you can even specify how sour you like it) and — if your stomach is elasticated — chips.

4

CRAFT BEER
It's hard to walk down a Montreal street without tripping over a bar specialising in microbrewery beer these days and many actually have the brewery attached.

5

CORN ON THE COB
Jean-Talon Market is one of the world's great farmer's markets, and in August and September stalls sell corn cobs, picked that morning, ludicrously cheap. Roll them in butter, or don't — they're sweet enough on their own.

Air Canada flies from Heathrow to Montreal from £400 return. W Montreal, in Old Montreal, has double rooms from C$233 (£137), room only. *aircanada.com* *w-hotels.marriott.com*

IMAGES: CRAIG MOYES; ALAMY

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Neighbourhood

CAPE TOWN

The South African city's dramatic location is well known, but its ongoing transformation into a modern, 21st-century city is just as remarkable as the scenery. Words: Zane Henry. Photographs: Teagan Cunniffe

ILLUSTRATION: KERYY HYNDMAN

The white sand beaches, verdant botanical gardens and inimitable outline of Table Mountain — Cape Town is rightly famous for its iconic setting. And recently, whole blocks in the centre have mushroomed into mini-villages of galleries, cafes and community spaces. You can find formerly rough districts courting travellers with distinct cultural experiences, design-forward neighbourhoods being brought to life and sections being rejuvenated by homegrown restaurateurs, artists and architects. But Cape Town is more than a theme park for visitors. Rippling just behind the shiny new developments is a rich and complex history that shapes the city's character.

East City Precinct

Buitenkant and Harrington Streets, two parallel roads on the outskirts of East City Precinct (formerly known as District 6), are lined with coffee shops, design studios and tattoo parlours, and are on the vanguard of the area's regeneration. They're also home to three of the city's best foodie experiences.

A fixture on Cape Town bucket lists, Truth Coffee is located in a former furniture factory on Buitenkant Street. This coffee shop is a spectacle in itself, doubling as a temple to steampunk, crammed with ostentatious gear-and-cog flourishes.

"The whole area is popping off," James, a waiter here, says. "In the past year or so loads of new places have opened. You can walk around here at night quite safely and there's just a great vibe in the air."

Across the street, Swan Cafe is a newer addition to the neighbourhood. It's a gleaming incarnation of a Parisian creperie, serving featherlight *galettes* (traditional French flat cakes) and beetroot lattes in an interior designer's dream — tungsten bulbs hang from the ceiling in burnished copper bird cages and the counter is scalloped with tiles in many shades of blue.

We eat dinner at Belly of the Beast, a new restaurant owned and run by chefs Neil Swart and Anouchka Horn. Every day, they create fresh menus of stripped-down haute cuisine, with an emphasis on sustainable, seasonal local ingredients. No more than 20 people are served in this minimalist space with black walls, brown wood and raw brick.

This kind of elevated gastronomy is light years away from what would have been served in District Six homes, like my grandparents', a few decades ago. This multicultural slum fell foul of the government's Group Areas Act in the 1970s; houses were bulldozed and the area was decreed suitable for white people only.

District Six Museum is the place to learn more of this, housed in a former Methodist church across the street from Truth Coffee. The guide, Abubaker Brown, is standing in the vestibule surrounded by sunburnt tourists, having already started his tour. The museum features old street signs, government declarations and actual rubble from the demolitions. The floor is covered in an illustrated map of the district with handwritten notes from former inhabitants indicating where their homes used to be. There's even a recreation of what a home of that time would have looked like, down to a poignant pile of kids' toys in the corner.

It's a stirring, powerful experience that underlines the chequered history of the area.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Waitress, Truth Coffee; Old Biscuit Mill; Swan Cafe interior

Woodstock

Rashied Staggie, the former leader of one of the largest gangs in Cape Town, now lives in cosy retirement on Woodstock's Gympie Street. Once the most dangerous street in Cape Town — almost entirely owned by gangs — it was a no-go zone. Now both Staggie and Woodstock live in the shadow of towering construction developments.

This former textile neighbourhood has become the focus of intensive regeneration and urban development. Kids are kicking footballs against construction site barriers, and old people are screwing up their faces at the noise from angle grinders.

The epicentre of Woodstock's gentrification is the Old Biscuit Mill, a regenerated urban village of markets, office space, boutique shops and restaurants. Every weekend, Neighbourgoods Market is filled with people who have no business being so good-looking on a Saturday morning. This food market is one of the best in the country — the aromas of Ethiopian injera, Spanish paella, Philly-style chilli cheese steaks all duelling for supremacy in the air.

The real jewel in the Old Biscuit Mill's crown is the Test Kitchen. Chef Luke-Dale Roberts' boundary-pushing restaurant has been featured in many international best-of lists. Making your way through the tasting menu is a proper experience — around four hours of being dazzled by dish after dish.

A little walk down the street takes me to Hope on Hopkins, a gin distillery, where Woodstock runs into neighbouring suburb, Salt River. It's a beautiful, airy space with a tasting room on a mezzanine overlooking the distillery floor. Salt River isn't nearly as gentrified as Woodstock, but owner Lucy Beard believes it's likely to happen soon.

"My husband and I were living in London and decided to seek our fortune back home," she says. "We were looking for a good home for our distillery and we fell in love with this area. It's close enough to the buzz of the Old Biscuit Mill, while still retaining some community feel. It's a great place."

When in Cape Town

1

CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN ART

The Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa is a former grain silo that's been converted into a nine-floor collection of galleries showcasing art from Africa and the diaspora.
zeitzmocaa.museum

2

GIN

Cape Town is home to a number of artisanal distilleries such as Hope on Hopkins and Woodstock Gin Company. A large number of gin bars have sprung up, too, including the 'secret' Gin Bar in Wale Street, behind a chocolate shop.

3

GATSBYS

The unofficial flagship dish of Cape Town, the Gatsby is a foot-long sandwich of chips, salad, sauces and spiced meat. Try one at the Golden Dish in Rylands, though Lekker Vegan in Harrington Street does a great vegan version.

4

OPENING UP THE CITY

Open Streets is an initiative that promotes safe streets across the city through organised walks, debates and kid's events. On the first Thursday of each month, galleries, shops, studios and bars open until late.

5

SPINACH KING

No longer the purview of overpriced shops in the city centre, healthy food is becoming popular across Cape Town. Founded by Lufefe Nomjana, Spinach King serves up delicious spinach-based food and drinks.

Khayelitsha

Cape Town's largest township, Khayelitsha, came into being in 1985. It's hard to say for certain how big it actually is, as much of it's still informal housing and the population can't be accurately counted in an official census. It's a young place —more than 40% of inhabitants are under 19 — with 99% of its population black.

It's also not a place many travellers used to visit. I'd never been here before, despite living about 20 minutes away during my childhood in post-apartheid South Africa. But this is starting to change. There's a powerful entrepreneurial spirit among Khayelitsha's people, manifesting itself in unique and exciting attractions that are drawing in local and international visitors.

One of the best ways to feel the township's pulse is on a bicycle tour with ABCD Concepts. I meet Ayanda and Buntu at Lookout Hill, from the top of which you can see the distant outline of Table Mountain and the township swaggering into Friday evening below us. We set off, cycling through the haze of *shisa nyama* (barbecue) joints and *kwaito* music blasting from the boots of cars, as people shake off the week and get ready to party.

We stop off at Siki's Koffee Kafe, lauded as the first 'proper' coffee shop in Khayelitsha, run out of owner Sikelela Dibela's driveway. He spent time honing his craft in London, before returning home with a mission. "I want to educate people about coffee," he says. "I make my own blend — accessible, but still complex — made for the local palate."

He hosts more entrepreneurs in rooms towards the back of the property, including some dazzling homespun East African fashion. Another room is the headquarters of Ghetto Sessions, a regular series of poetry/live music events held at Siki's.

Suitably buzzed, we cycle right up to the door of 4Roomed eKasi Culture, Khayelitsha's first fine-dining establishment. It's the domain of chef-owner Abigail Mbalo, a runner-up in *MasterChef South Africa*. On leaving the show (after an unfortunate incident with burned sugar), she decided that, rather than continuing her food dream in the city centre, she wanted to sow her seeds at home. The concept stems from traditional township houses, which comprised four rooms: a kitchen, living room and two bedrooms. Abigail serves contemporary interpretations of township classics, such as *mleqwa* chicken slow-cooked in fennel, while also showcasing local lifestyle ideas and art and design.

We head to Rands, an outdoor nightclub where Khayelitsha gathers on a Friday night. The air is soft and warm, and hundreds of people are dancing and drinking, weaving in and out of the braai smoke.

We're drunk and happy. The only thing that's remotely sad is that I missed out on this place when I lived in Cape Town.

South African Airways operates flights from Heathrow to Johannesburg and connections to Cape Town. *flysaa.com*
Kensington Place boutique hotel offers standard double rooms from £185, B&B. *kensingtonplace.co.za*
The Silo Hotel offers double rooms from £740, B&B. *theroyalportfolio.com/the-silo*

MORE INFO

Truth Coffee. *truth.coffee*
Swan Cafe. *swancafe.co.za*
Belly of the Beast. *bellyofthebeast.co.za*
District Six Museum. *districtsix.co.za*
The Old Biscuit Mill. *theoldbiscuitmill.co.za*
The Test Kitchen. *thetestkitchen.co.za*
Hope on Hopkins. *hopeonhopkins.co.za*
Zeitz MOCAA. *zeitzmocaa.museum*
Woodstock Gin Company. *woodstockginco.co.za*
Gin Bar. *theginbar.co.za*
The Golden Dish. *thegoldendish.co.za*
Lekker Vegan. *lekkervegan.co.za*
Open Streets. *openstreets.org.za*
First Thursdays. *first-thursdays.co.za*
Spinach King. *spinachking.co.za*
Skik's Kofee Kafe. *facebook.com/sikiskoffeekafe*
ABCD Concepts. *abcd-concepts.co.za*
4Roomed eKasi Culture. *4roomedekasiculture.com*

ABOVE FROM LEFT: 4Roomed eKasi Culture; Rands, Khayelitsha

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Sleep

BODRUM

The Bodrum Peninsula, with its wealth of beaches, offers an array of resorts, from affordable-yet-chic boltholes to decadent havens of luxury, with many opting for a stylish, minimalist vibe. Words: Chris Leadbeater

In its original incarnation as Halicarnassus, Bodrum was home to one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus. But over time, the tomb crumbled and the port city faded into relative obscurity. Today, the city and the eponymous peninsula it stands on have reinvented themselves as one of the hippest hotspots on the Mediterranean. Not only has it avoided much of the high-rise development elsewhere on the Turkish coast, but it's also come to revel in hotels of real elegance, with a lively array of excellent restaurants and busy bars. Resorts aren't just clustered in Bodrum itself, but are dotted all around the peninsula, on whose south flank the city sits. It may no longer be an ancient wonder, but chic modernity suits Bodrum perfectly.

IMAGE: GETTY

For luxury calm

£££ AMANRUYA

It doesn't actually say 'oasis' above the entrance to this gorgeous bolthole (although 'aman' means 'peace and security' in Indonesian), but it may as well do. Amanruya which lies on the north coast of the peninsula, near the village of Torba, feels removed from the world. Just 36 sizeable 'pavilions' wait discreetly on a slight hillside, their honey-coloured walls framed by lemon trees and paths that wind down to what is, essentially, a private bay. Above, an infinity pool, a spa and a library add to the air of tranquillity. It comes at a price, but if you want to escape from it all, this is your haven.

ROOMS: Doubles from €839 (£722), B&B.

aman.com

For party people

££ 4REASONS HOTEL+BISTRO

Bodrum's bar scene promises long and lively nights without ever making you feel you've stumbled into a garish, open-all-hours resort. This can certainly be said of Yalikavak, where bars line the streets around the marina. Just outside the town and perfectly poised for a night on the tiles is 4reasons, whose modern vibe comes from walk-in showers and minimalist decor. Visitors can happily spend their days next to the pool, but the hotel is close enough to the action that they can be clinking glasses on the main drag, Carsi Caddesi, as soon as they summon the will to move.

ROOMS: Doubles from €158 (£136), B&B.
4reasonshotel.com

For Bond girls and boys

££ CARESSE, A LUXURY COLLECTION RESORT & SPA, BODRUM

Cutting a dash on the water, Caresse looks like the sort of idyll James Bond might drift around at mission's end, shirt unbuttoned. Fittingly, the house yacht was even used in the filming of 2006 blockbuster *Casino Royale*. Guests can cast off into the sunset, the ghosts of espionage thrillers past fluttering in the sails, before returning to the nicely compact retreat where 77 rooms, suites and villas overlook a private beach, and whose Glass Lounge serves punchy cocktails.

ROOMS: Doubles from €250 (£215), B&B.
caresse.com

For spa serenity

£££ THE BODRUM EDITION

Formed of an alliance between ultra-hip New York hotelier Ian Schrager and accommodation behemoth Marriott International, The Bodrum Edition can be found in Yalikavak, just minutes from Bodrum Castle and Bodrum Amphitheatre. Most of the 108 rooms and suites peer at the Aegean, and some have private pools. Guests keen to cast off their cares gravitate to the spa, with its Turkish hammam, 14 treatment rooms and outdoor cabanas, for gentle, sea-view kneadings. A highlight here is the Hawaiian lomi lomi massage.

ROOMS: Doubles from €353 (£303), B&B.
editionhotels.com

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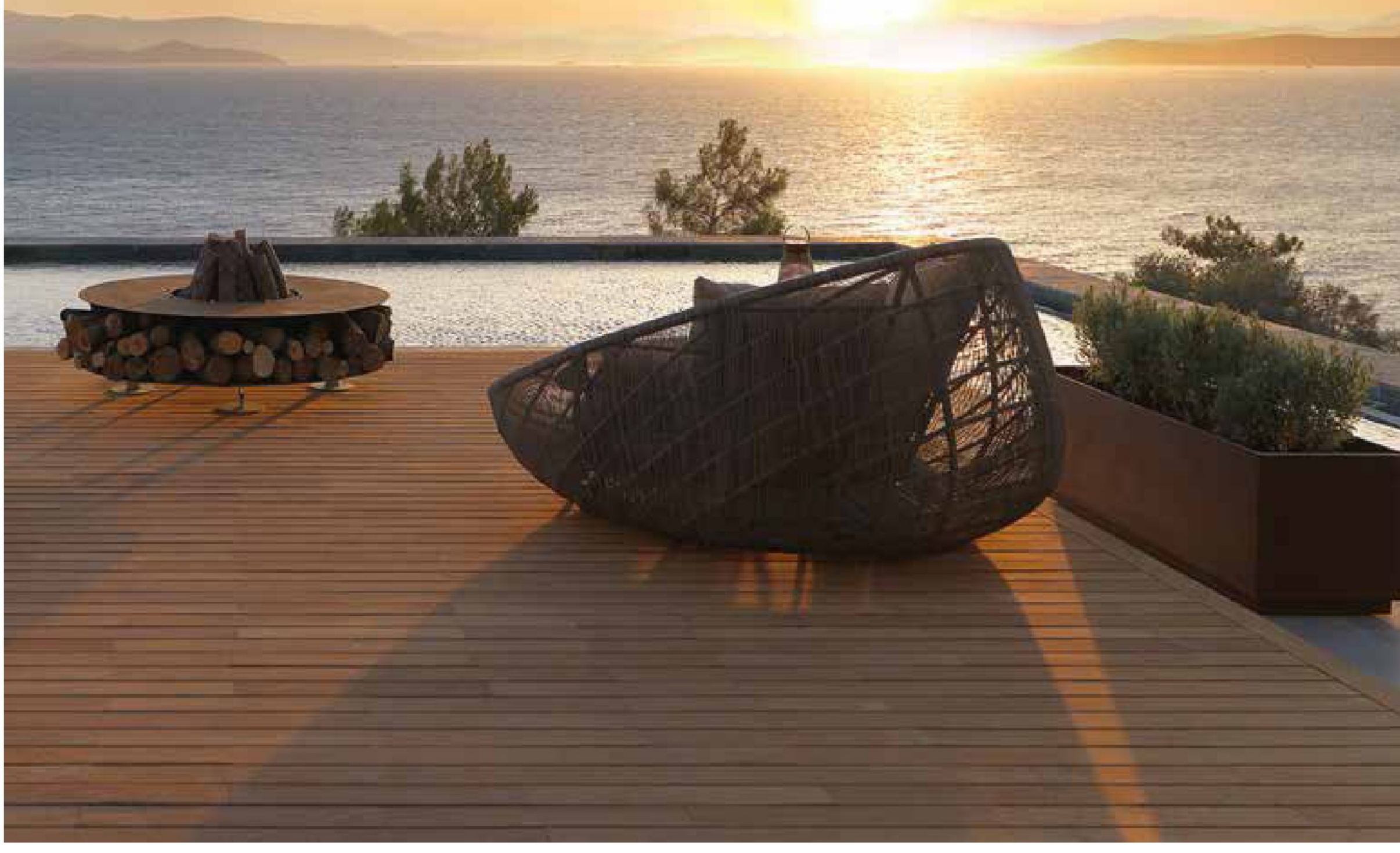
For greedy gourmets

£££ MANDARIN ORIENTAL, BODRUM

Sitting pretty above Paradise Bay, the Mandarin Oriental, Bodrum has 132 rooms and suites, decked out with neutral tones and handsome teak panelling. Many of the rooms have views onto the two private beaches, but its three main restaurants are a highlight here, flying a flag for the flavours of Japan, Italy and Turkey respectively. Bodrum Balikcisi falls in the latter camp, serving the likes of sardines marinated in garlic and beetroot-infused raki, plus a 'gobek salad' of lettuce, hazelnuts, roasted sesame seeds and seaweed.

ROOMS: Doubles from €350 (£301), B&B. *mandarinoriental.com*



For family frills

££ HILTON BODRUM TURKBUKU RESORT & SPA

Perched on the headland above Türkbükü, the Hilton has a host of indoor and outdoor pools, a kids' club, and children's menus in the restaurants, with wakeboarding and water-skiing available for teenagers. Parents, meanwhile, will love the ayurvedic spa.

ROOMS: Doubles (for two adults, one child) from €158 (£136), room only. *hilton.com*

For boutique bargains

£ DIVAN BODRUM

Divan Bodrum, on the northern tip of Türkbükü, exudes an easy trendiness that belies its affordability and its 60 rooms are decorated in soothing pastel tones. There's a private beach and an outdoor pool that's an ideal spot for dozing. Iskele Restaurant, meanwhile, serves delicious Mediterranean fare and Sahil Bar mixes cocktails on the waterfront.

ROOMS: Doubles from €90 (£77), B&B. *divan.com.tr*

For city convenience

£ ENA BOUTIQUE HOTEL

Ena is ideally located if you want to base your trip around Bodrum's compact, buzzy centre. Inexpensive yet comfy, it has 18 rooms of fair size, bathrooms with rain showers, and a roof terrace from which you can gaze across city roofs to the seafront beyond. It's also a short walk from here to Bodrum Castle and the bars along Cumhuriyet Caddesi.

ROOMS: Doubles from £69, B&B. *enahotel.com*

For art aficionados

££ CASA DELL'ARTE

The Bodrum Peninsula's embrace of the finer things in life is encapsulated by this fashionable retreat, which brings its brightness to the waterfront at Torba, a place once solely devoted to fishing. As its name suggests, it delights in strong colours, thought-provoking paintings and dashes of creative flair. Artworks and sculptures fill out a lobby that's defined by light and space, while pieces by Turkish artists inject local perspective onto the walls of the breezy guest rooms. Yet for all this, the hotel's main appeal is surely its location — you sleep within earshot of the tide.
ROOMS: Doubles from €209 (£181), B&B.
casadellartebodrum.com

For chic day-dreamers

££ NIKKI BEACH

Some destinations spark an urge to rise at dawn and head out to explore. Bodrum is not one of those places — and Nikki Beach demonstrates why. Here is a hideaway, in the vicinity of Torba, where hiding is the whole point. White furnishings, from linen in the rooms to the loungers at the pool and the beach club, are an invitation to indolence. The Sunset Lounge is set up for cocktails at dusk. Cafe Nikki serves light Mediterranean fare, including mezze platters of shrimp and octopus, while the spa offers a 70-minute body mud wrap. The message is simple: come and stay — the world can wait.
ROOMS: Doubles from €171 (£147), B&B.
bodrum.nikkibeach.com

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WORDS: **JULIA BUCKLEY**

ROME: **WILD RHINOCEROS**

PALAZZO RHINOCEROS IS HOME TO ALDA FENDI'S LATEST ART SPACE, AS WELL AS THE ROOMS OF ROME, A BOLD NEW HOTEL CONCEPT THAT COUNTS MICHELANGELO DRAWINGS AMONG THE DECOR

There are hotel suites and then there's apartment 25 at The Rooms of Rome. The view through the window is classic Rome: the Foro Boario — an ancient cattle market — with its pair of tiny temples and the Tiber snaking behind it. Craning my neck, I can see the start of the long green stretch that is the Circus Maximus.

Turning back into the room, I'm plunged into a scene straight out of a glossy design magazine. On the one hand is an aesthetic so deconstructed that various layers of paint are crumbling off the walls. A whitewashed rectangle suggests an erstwhile door. By the window, a bearded man smoking a cigarette is pencilled straight onto the fading paint.

But there's nothing shabby chic about the rest of the room — a high-design affair of dark, minimalist leather furniture plus lashings of stainless steel, from the bedside shelves to the kitchen island. Then there's the giant, floor-to-ceiling stainless steel cube in the middle of the apartment that separates the bedroom from the living area and conceals cupboards, drawers and a full — also entirely stainless steel — bathroom.

This breath of fresh air has been delivered to the Eternal City by Alda Fendi, who, along with her four sisters, helped turned the family fashion house into a global brand. In 2001, after Fendi was sold, Alda turned her attention to art, setting up arts organisation Fondazione Alda Fendi, which stages pop-up artistic and theatrical productions in Rome.

The Fendis are no strangers to Roman design. The fashion house paid for the 2014 restoration of the city's Trevi Fountain. In 2015, it rented what's known as the 'Square Colosseum' — a monumental, rectangular take on the Colosseum with a neoclassical-meets-brutalist facade built by Mussolini's regime — as its headquarters. Fendi turned the ground floor into a modern art gallery.

But Alda Fendi has gone one step further with The Rooms of Rome. Eight years ago, she bought a dilapidated, six-storey, 18th-century palazzo overlooking the Arco di Giano, a fourth-century arch next to Rome's legendary, open-mouthed Bocca della Verità sculpture. Architect Jean Nouvel was tasked with transforming the building, which he christened Palazzo Rhinoceros, into a gallery and cultural space (Fondazione Alda Fendi - Esperimenti) — with integrated hotel and restaurant.

Nouvel's bold project sees the building stripped back to its bare bones: the 25 apartments have crumbling layers of paint, there's exposed brick, stone, plaster and joists around the staircases and corridors; and even the central heating pipes are encased in glass. Leaving the building's past on show, the only thing Nouvel has introduced is all that stainless steel and a sprawling roof terrace with stunning views of the Palatine hill.

The building is a dialogue between public and private, and between Roman culture and outside influences. The gallery comprises three spaces — on the ground, first and third floors, interwoven with the hotel — plus projections in the stairwells of past Alda Fendi productions. During my stay, a Michelangelo statue — accompanied by 14 architectural drawings, on display throughout the building — takes pride of place. It's here for three months on loan from St Petersburg's State Hermitage Museum, which is releasing a different artwork to the gallery each year for the next three years.

When the gallery is closed, the sculpture is out of bounds but the sketches aren't; every time I return to my apartment, I have a private view. It's just me and Michelangelo, divided by a sheet of glass and 500 years.

Then I push the steel door to my room and come back to the 21st century.

The Rooms of Rome has double rooms from €233 (£200) a night, B&B. theroomsofrome.com

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VENICE: **SEEKING SCARPA**

LOOK HARD ENOUGH AMID THE CHURCHES AND PALAZZI AND YOU'LL FIND TEMPLES TO MODERN ARCHITECTURE DESIGNED BY VENICE NATIVE CARLO SCARPA

It takes me several minutes, while standing in the Fondamenta dei Tolentini area, to clock the Università Iuav di Venezia (IUAV), a design-themed university whose entrance area was created by Italian architect Carlo Scarpa. At first, all I can see is a canal, a bridge and a bombastic neoclassical church. And then I see it. Next to the church is a low, ribbed concrete wall with a gap in the middle, above which a concrete slab is suspended in mid-air, looking as if it's about to slam shut. A sliding panel of glass and marble forms the door. It's a triumph of design, its simplicity belying the skill behind it.

Most of us love Venice for its lack of modernity — something Scarpa, who was born here in 1906, was well aware of. In response, he specialised in buildings that almost dare you to walk on past, and yet inspire wonder with their level of detail. Scarpa designed only the gateway and front garden of the IUAV (a former convent), in his signature style — lashings of concrete embellished with decorative features. It's typical of his work in a city that simply had no room for new buildings, forcing him to adapt his style to what was already there, rather than start from scratch.

Despite his international fame, Scarpa stayed close to home, and was rector at the IUAV from 1971-74. If you know where to look, his works can be found lurking throughout Venice: sparkling crystals of modernity amid the sumptuous baroque chandeliers. In St Mark's Square, turn your back on the Basilica and its huge Campanile, and you'll see the Olivetti Showroom — a display space for typewriters, completed in 1958 — nestled inconspicuously at the back of the famous porticoes.

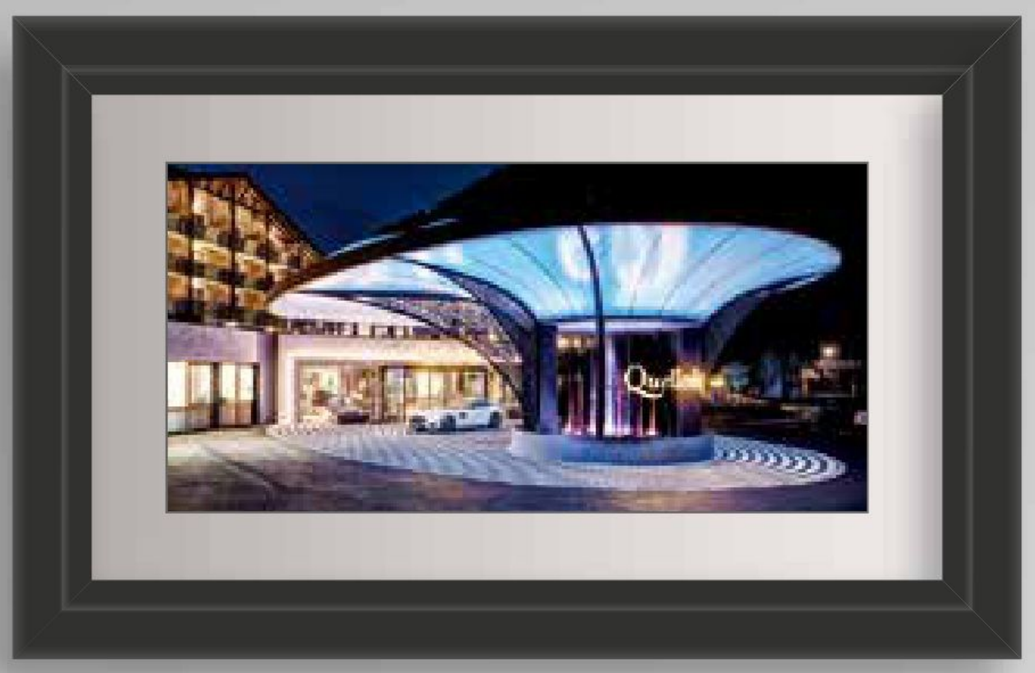
Over on Murano is the Venini glass factory, where Scarpo served as artistic director from 1932 until 1947. In the smart showroom are Scarpa's signature *murrine romane* (delicate, geometric-patterned vases that fizz with bright colours) and his *murrine opache*: porcelain-like opaque glassware from 1940.

At Ca' Foscari, Venice's main university, Scarpa designed the Aula Baratto — a grand lecture theatre, almost as high as it is long, overlooking the Grand Canal from the Rialto to the Accademia Bridge. The view from the balcony — accessed via a set of Scarpa's signature sliding doors — is one of the city's most magnificent. The room is equally breathtaking, with its block-cut wood flooring, key-shaped chairs of 'striped' interlaced wood, and a series Y-shaped *boiserie* columns that divide the hall from the corridor. Scarpa was influenced by Japanese aesthetics, and it shows.

But it's at the Fondazione Querini Stampalia — an art foundation and gallery — where his work is most Venetian. From

IMAGES: ALAMY; ALESSANDRA CHEMOLLO

PREVIOUS PAGE: The Rooms of Rome
LEFT: Fondazione Querini Stampalia



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Scarpa created a created a dreamscape where 18th-century gargoyles watch over chequered tiling, and baroque columns sit alongside art deco-style cladding

1949-63, he redesigned part of the ground floor and back garden to create a sublime interweaving of old and new. Travertine blocks are placed over crumbling brick walls, concrete slabs seem to hover on top of original stairs, and floors have been raised to make flood channels of the original paving. Scarpa, the story goes, was asked to design something to combat *acqua alta* (tidal flooding). But instead, he embraced it, creating a dreamscape where 18th-century gargoyles watch over chequered tiling, and baroque columns sit alongside art deco-style cladding. An iron grille opens onto the canal, the water sliding in with every passing gondola, and rising up and down with the tides.

I visit on a day of *acqua alta*, just as the tide is retreating from the city, and it's mesmerising. I find his steps down to the grille submerged by the lagoon, water pooling in the adjacent room, reflecting its brilliant travertine walls, and a pump funnelling out the water that's flowed inside back to where it belongs. Except, Scarpa has said via this extraordinary work: right here, in these rooms and in this garden, is exactly where it belongs.

Hotel Santa Chiara has doubles from €130 (£111), B&B. Kirker Holidays has three nights' B&B at the same hotel, including flights from Gatwick, water taxi transfers and Doge's Palace tickets, from £598 per person. hotelsantachiara.it kirkerholidays.com

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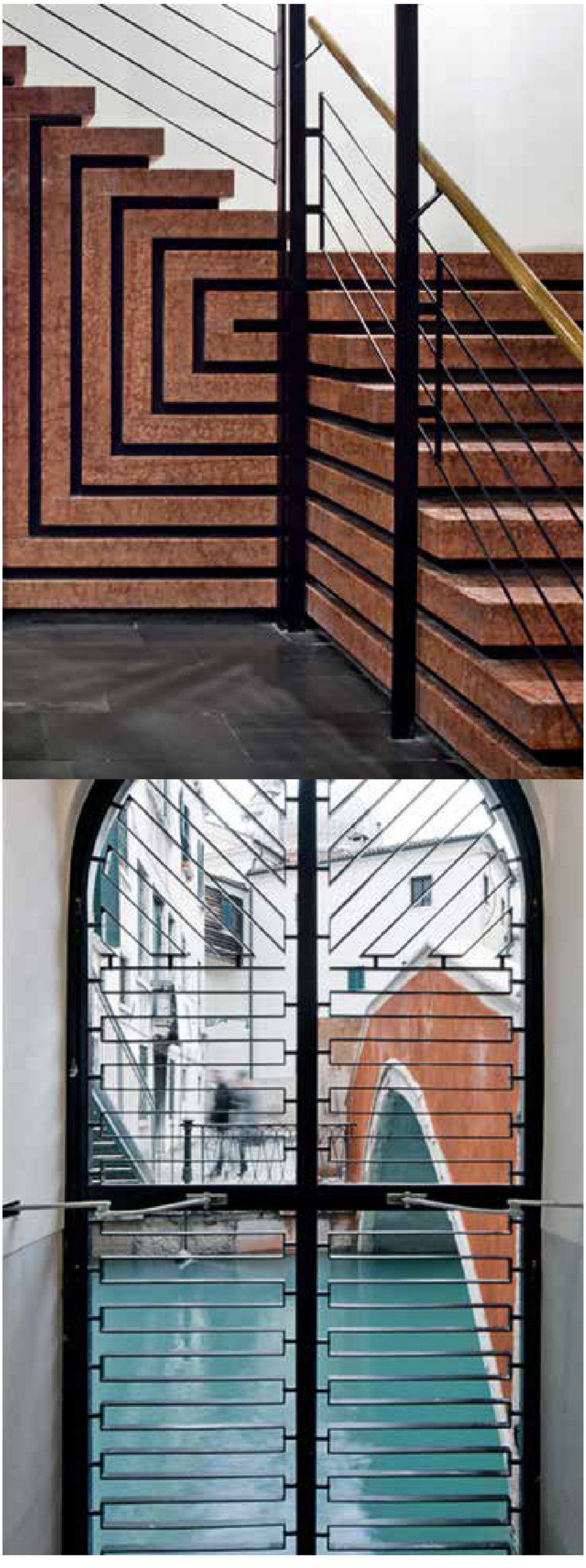


RIGHT: Fondazione Querini Stampalia

ASK THE ARCHITECT: **CLAUDIO NARDI**

IN HIS NATIVE FLORENCE, CLAUDIO NARDI HAS DESIGNED EVERYTHING FROM THE MARBLE MUSEUM IN THE PALAZZO MEDICI RICCARDI, AND THE BRIDGE OF LOVE INSTALLATION OVER THE ARNO, TO THE NEW RIVA LOFTS FLORENCE HOTEL, RUN BY HIS SON AND DAUGHTER

HOW DOES ITALY INSPIRE CREATIVITY?
Being based in Florence has given me a knowledge of tradition, but also the desire to add contemporary elements. Treading the line between tradition and modernity is the first thing I do. It's a wish to be original, but to get close to the root and adapt it.

IS ITALIAN ARCHITECTURE A 'LANGUAGE'?
Yes, it's humanistic. Two of the best architects of the 20th century, Carlo Scarpa and Gio Ponti, always bore in mind all the levels of a project: details, interiors, architecture, and the insertion of the architecture into its urban context. Scarpa had close relationships with artisans; he cared about interiors and objects. Ponti built skyscrapers but also ceramics. They brought everything back to a human scale.

WHAT ARE YOUR INFLUENCES?
I love set design and I've always been inspired by the Sicilian baroque, the idea of making theatres out of cities. Florence is another kind of theatre — more severe, but it gives equilibrium. My other inspiration is Mediterranean architecture — 'architecture without architects', made up of cubes, whites, little windows — interacting with nature with a perfect naturalness.

HOW DID RIVA LOFTS HAPPEN?
It's not a design hotel — I loathe them. I wanted to do a hotel that would be like a collective memory: filaments of history grafted inside and out. The building was originally my studio. Inside, we used furniture from the 1700s and from the 1940s and 1950s, plus I designed some myself. I thought: an architect can't just remove their entire history. So, I thought of a place that could belong to me, Alice and Alessandro [his children] — a space that could be shared with people who are dear to me.

WITH SO MANY CENTURIES OF ARCHITECTURE IN ITALY, IS THERE FREEDOM TO INVENT?
There's a culture of absolute conservationism at the moment. But many buildings could be reworked. My passion is to work with Italy's existing fabric. I had an office for 10 years in Krakow, and there are lots of industrial heritage buildings redeveloped there. Conserving the roots while you transform them gives fantastic depth to the new organisms — that's what I was aiming for when I designed the MOCAK [Museum of Contemporary Art in Krakow].

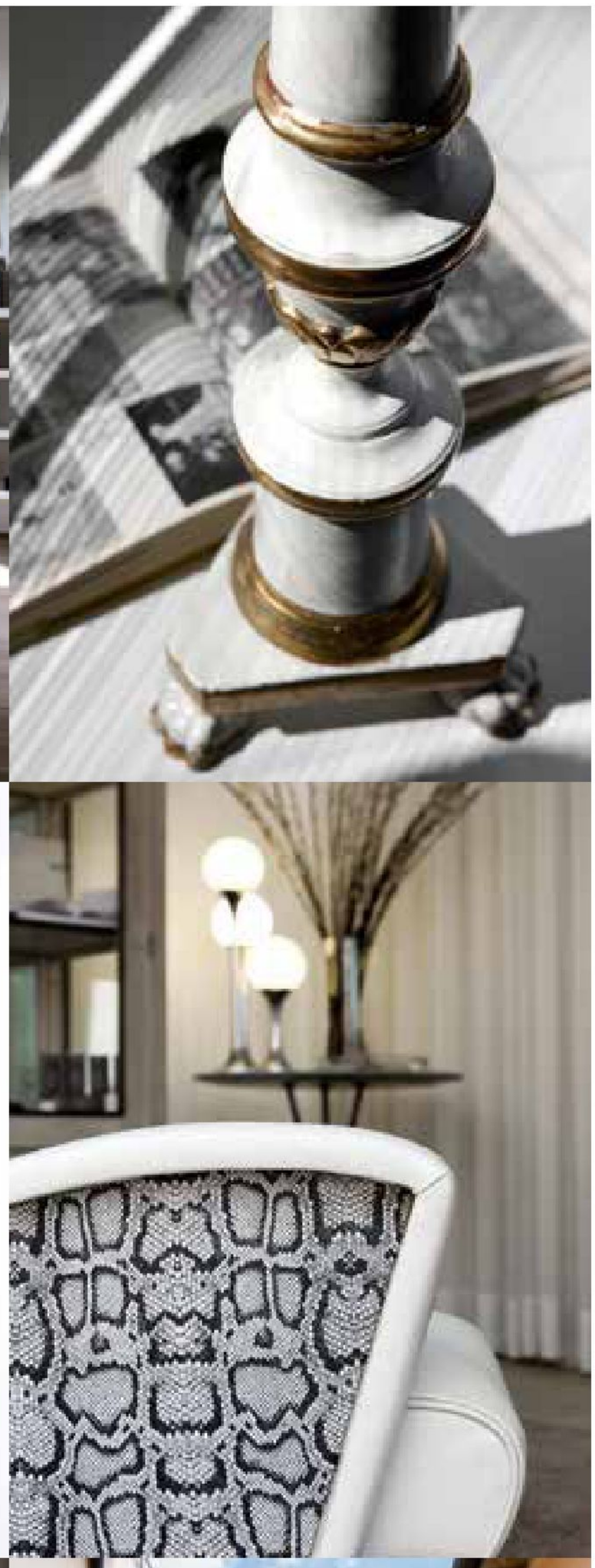
WHAT ARE YOUR FAVOURITE PROJECTS?
Years ago, I did one of the first Dolce & Gabbana shops in Milan. It was a chance to play with set design — I did the flooring and researched Sicilian gothic motifs. It was more set design than it was architecture. For the Port Authority building at Marina di Carrara, I was inspired by 1930s Italian rationalist architecture, while the headquarters of Florence's Mandragora Publishers is very different — a lot of layers and lightness.

HOW ABOUT YOUR FAVOURITE BUILDINGS?
My absolute favourite is the Pantheon in Rome — all the history of humanity is in there. Casa Malaparte, on the island of Capri, is marvellous: a rationalist 1930s building on this rock spur, made by both man and nature. You couldn't build something like that anymore; you have to build away from the coast these days. But the Italy we all love is anthropomorphised nature. It's hills crowned with villages, towns perched above the sea. Architecture should not just consume land. It should always add beauty, not subtract it. *claudionardi.it*

Riva Lofts Florence has doubles from £107, B&B. rivalofts.com

"I love set design. I've always been inspired by the Sicilian baroque, the idea of making theatres out of cities. Florence is another kind of theatre — more severe, but it gives equilibrium."
Claudio Nardi

RIGHT: Riva Lofts Florence



IMAGES: LEONARDO BETTI; ALBERT FONT

STARCHITECTS: **SHOWSTOPPING ITALIAN STRUCTURES**

ITALY'S NEWEST OLD PORT: **PORTO ANTICO, GENOA**

On completion of his ambitious Porto Antico regeneration project in 1992, Renzo Piano hailed the city of this birth, Genoa, as "one of the most beautiful cities in the world". The architect had overseen a remarkable transformation of a previously decrepit industrial area, blighted by ugly flyovers and cut off from Europe's largest medieval city centre, into what's been dubbed 'the square on the Mediterranean'.

This chic, modern district — created to mark the 500th anniversary of Genoa-born Christopher Columbus's first landing in the Americas — is home to the Genoa Aquarium (Europe's largest), which sits on the harbourfront like a row of shipping containers; the Biosphere, a tropical forest inside a glass sphere floating on the water; and the glass-fronted Maritime Museum. Then there's the Bigo, a panoramic lift, hoisted up to a height of 130ft and rotated 360 degrees on one of six monumental white arms cantilevered over the sea — like a mechanical flower that hasn't quite bloomed (or, rather, like the port cranes it was inspired by). Along with what looks like a mini Sydney Opera House beside it, events space Piazza delle Feste, it's become a new Genoese landmark.

Tourists may flock to the Porto Antico for its attractions, but locals come for the *passeggiata* (evening stroll) or for dining with top-floor views at the Eataly Genova foodhall.

But it's more than all that. As Piano says, Porto Antico has "re-established [Genoa's] link to the water", delivering the city of seafarers back to the sea and giving Genoa back its soul. Piano's next project is to be the replacement of the city's Morandi Bridge, which tragically collapsed last August. His elegant, steel-and-concrete design — white, minimalist, supported by tall piers at regular intervals — is expected to be complete by April 2020. *portoantico.it*

Bigo, Porto Antico
OPPOSITE PAGE FROM TOP:
Ara Pacis; Bosco Verticale

IMAGES: ALAMY; PAOLO ROSSELLI

Milan's 'vertical forest' is a 'green' housing development in a literal sense: two bushy apartment blocks in the futuristic Porta Nuova business with trees and plants sprouting out of them from every angle

LIVING HISTORY:
ARA PACIS, ROME
Built alongside the Tiber between 13 BC and 9 BC to celebrate Emperor Augustus's conquests abroad, the Ara Pacis is a sculpted altar with a processional frieze depicting the imperial family. Architect Richard Meier's 2006 museum to house it — a modernist steel, glass, travertine and plaster box on the edge of the Tiber — has created a superb interplay between past and present. Visitors can take a virtual-reality tour of the site while wearing 3D headsets, and get a whole new perspective on the faces in the frieze as traffic zips past outside on the Lungotevere. *arapacis.it*

ORGANIC ARCHITECTURE:
BOSCO VERTICALE, MILAN
Milan's 'vertical forest' is a 'green' housing development in a literal sense: two bushy apartment blocks in the futuristic Porta Nuova business with trees and plants sprouting out of them from every angle. Not just pretty, they're also ecologically sound, being energy-saving and carbon dioxide-absorbing. *stefanoboeriarchitetti.net*

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BELLA CULTURA: **ITALY'S MOST STRIKING NEW CULTURAL SPACES**

FASHIONABLE ART: **FONDAZIONE PRADA, MILAN**

Located in Largo Isarco, in the south of Milan, Fondazione Prada is, incredibly, the city's first contemporary art museum. The work of Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas, it centres around the juxtaposition of a century-old former gin distillery with three fiercely incongruous new structures. 'Torre', a nine-storey concrete tower, erupts from in between the older buildings, dwarfing the industrial heritage, pointing to the future, while artworks from the Prada Collection — mostly 20th and 21st century — are on permanent display in the 'Haunted House', an original building that Koolhaas clad in 24-carat gold foil.

The interiors are equally startling; film director Wes Anderson designed the whimsical bar — evoking Milanese cafes of old — while the restaurant's chairs and tables are the work of renowned Finnish architect and industrial designer Eero Saarinen. *fondazioneprada.org*

What looks like the looming presence of a giant tortoise on the horizon, behind rows of vines, is actually the work of Arnaldo Pomodoro

THE ART OF SCIENCE:
MUSE, TRENTO
With its angular steel-and-glass panels and white stone walls, Trento's eco-friendly science museum looks rather like the Dolomites that surround it. And if you think it also looks a little reminiscent of The Shard, in London, that'll be because it was designed by the same architect: Renzo Piano. *muse.it*

ARTISTICALLY TRAINED:
OGR, TURIN
For over a century, the OGR (Officine Grandi Riparazioni) was a place where the city's trains were mended. After closing in the early 1990s, the vast complex of workshops fell into disrepair. Two years ago, it reopened as an arts and events space, with the struts, pilasters and barn-like ceilings retained from its previous incarnation.

Outside, in one of its courtyards, stands an installation by South African artist William Kentridge. Inside one of the two hangar-sized main buildings is a mural by Venezuelan artist Arturo Herrera that nods to the site's heritage: its intricate grid of lines recalling railway tracks. *ogrtorino.it*

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: MUSE; Tenuta Castelbuono; the shop at OGR

IMAGES: A. MULAS; MICHELE D OTTAVIO

DESIGNED TO STAY: **ART HOTELS AND AWARD-WINNING APPELLATIONS**

DESIGNER VINES: **TENUTA CASTELBUONO, UMBRIA**

What looks like the looming presence of a giant tortoise on the horizon, behind rows of vines, is actually the work of Arnaldo Pomodoro. The winery's owners, the Lunelli family, commissioned the sculptor to create the giant 'carapace' at the centre of their vineyard half an hour from Perugia, not just as a work of art but as a place where wine is stored.

The copper-plated dome is slowly turning green through exposure to the elements and is riven with fissures that echo the furrows in the surrounding vineyards. Inside, barrels are arranged in concentric circles. And the shape echoes not just the Umbrian hills, but also the undulating landscape of Pomodoro's birthplace, the neighbouring Marche region.

Art or architecture? Pomodoro wanted to blur the lines. He also wanted to create an interface between the rolling hills outside and the chilled interior, where everything is done with precision. The structure's distinctive shape is no accident, either, according to the architect. "I had the idea of a shape that was reminiscent of a tortoise, a symbol of stability and longevity which, with its shell, represents the union between the land and the sky," he explained. *tenutelunelli.it*

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IMAGES: VALENTINA SOMMARIVA

ABOVE: Casa Flora

THE ARTY APART-HOTEL:
CASA FLORA, VENICE

Apartment hotel Casa Flora is a collaboration between the local Romanelli family and New York-based Italian designer Diego Paccagnella. Everything inside is custom designed in Italy, but even better, it's all for sale. The look is modern Venetian: Murano glass lamps and *palladiana terrazzo* flooring — a monochrome version of the speckled *terrazzo* tiling found across the city. The three bedrooms sport 'lagoon' colours (light pink, green, yellow and blue), while the green marble kitchen island is intended to evoke Venetian church altars. *casafloravenezia.com*

THE CHIC CHALET: **HOTEL SCHGAGULER, DOLOMITES**

The postcard-pretty village of Castelrotto in the Tyrolian Dolomites is home to this boutique hotel that's seen a dramatic transformation. Built in 1986, it was overhauled last year by Milanese architect Peter Pichler, who stripped it down to its chalet-shaped bones and rebuilt it. What's emerged is a concrete, pitched-roof chalet clad almost entirely in glass, stripped of all the traditional Alpine architectural frills of carved wood balconies and shutters. It's a minimalist mountain retreat for the 21st century. *schgaguler.com*

FROM TOP: Via Garibaldi 12; Fondaco dei Tedeschi

CHIC BOUTIQUES: **CONCEPT STORES AND DESIGN DENS**

CUTTING-EDGE CONCEPT STORE: **VIA GARIBALDI 12, GENOA**

Same old, same old, you think, walking along Via Garibaldi, a street within the UNESCO World Heritage Site at the heart of Genoa. A grand, 16th-century palazzo here, an even grander one there — until you get to Palazzo Campanella, at number 12. Inside this unassuming mansion is one of Italy's most extraordinary shops, a cutting-edge furniture and design store where crisp white sofas and supermodel-skinny chairs sit beneath mottled marble columns, and sunlight floods in through gabled windows. Under stucco panelling, elegant marble tables display 21st-century vases. Each of its eight rooms is more sumptuous than the last. A futuristic golden sofa designed by Zaha Hadid reclines beneath a frescoed ceiling in a hall of mirrors that recalls Versailles. And 21st-century porcelain sits on mirrored tables in a palatial room where every surface is stuccoed and gold-leafed.

THE ART DEPARTMENT: **FONDACO DEI TEDESCHI, VENICE**

This 16th-century trading hall overlooking the Rialto Bridge became a post office in the 20th century and then, in 2016, Venice's most spectacular department store. The conversion has kept the original structure — a kind of theatre-in-the round centred on an internal courtyard. Its wares are displayed across Napoleonic-era flooring, under a concrete-beamed ceiling. On your way to the rooftop terrace (stellar Grand Canal views), you'll pass through a new glass-roofed show space. Previous exhibitions have included a display of shoes (from a pair of 16th-century courtesan sandals to Christian Dior's finest) and a sound and light installation by Fabrizio Plessi and Michael Nyman. *dfs.com*

THE SHOP THAT THINKS IT'S A GALLERY: **CREATIVITY OGGETTI, TURIN**

When is a shop not a shop? The answer: when it stocks things of such quality that it doubles as a gallery. Creativity Oggetti brings together work by artists, designers and artisans, showcasing everything from jewellery to jugs. The ceramics are a highlight — from functional pieces to standalone 'sculptures' — and half the shop is a gallery, displaying modern jewellery from all over the world. *creativityoggetti.it*

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THE EARTH INSIDE OUT

Nicaragua is a geological hotspot — 19 volcanoes are strung across the west coast of this Central American country. Some produce apocalyptic acid rain, a few harbour orchids that bloom for a single day, others have churning lava lakes, plenty are smoking, many are tranquil. But all have played a part in literally shaping the country

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS
JAMIE LAFFERTY

I'm in a cloud forest on the active volcano Mombacho — the mountain's ragged, blasted peaks silhouetted against the city of Granada far below.

Mombacho hasn't erupted since the days of the conquistadors, when this land was known as the Captaincy General of Guatemala. Today, instead of fire and smoke, damp woods encircle its upper slopes like a green mantle.

Here on the mossy Puma Trail, near Mombacho's summit, it seems laughable that I'm standing on a geological bomb. Technically, an eruption could send me into the stratosphere, or immortalise me in ash, but in this thriving forest it's just as easy to believe the trees might protect me.

The destructive potential of Mombacho — and all of Nicaragua's active volcanoes — may seem apocalyptic, but I'm drawn to them for the complex, varied ecosystems that have developed on their slopes. My guide, Fernando, lists the outlandish flora and fauna we might see on this trail: orchids that bloom for just one day, ferns armed with poisonous spines, endemic salamanders capable of regenerating lost limbs, red-eyed tree frogs, two-toed sloths, and a whole appendix of things that slither and crawl and bite and sting. What there isn't, however, is a puma.

"Long ago," says Fernando a little doubtfully, "a farmer found some tracks, but the cave where the pumas lived has collapsed and now they've gone away." Or possibly, he concedes, they were killed by farmers.

Today, the approach to ecology on Mombacho is less trigger-happy — visitor access is strictly regulated. During our four-hour hike, the only damage to the environment I notice has been caused by the volcano itself. So toxic are the emissions from the active chamber that around the vents the mountain's moisture turns to acid rain, making eerie black skeletons of trees that unwisely seeded so close to oblivion.

This is the first volcano I've set foot on in a week of visiting them around Nicaragua. Some are covered in trees, some filled with water, some are smoking, many are tranquil — but they're always there, literally helping to shape the country.

Twin peaks

Romel has a wide grin and wild eyes. The 44-year-old guides visitors up Maderas volcano, around 60 miles south east of Mombacho. Along with Concepción volcano, it forms Ometepe, an island in the heart of Lake Nicaragua. Together, they look like the figure eight, an astonishing prehistoric centrepiece in a sea-sized body of water.

Romel's tours head either to a viewpoint — almost two sweaty hours from Maderas's

PREVIOUS PAGES: Foot of Cerro Negro.
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Concepción, Ometepe island; heavy rainfall along the Puma Trail helps to support a vast array of flora; white-throated magpie-jay, a common sight in Nicaragua

LEFT: Tourists watch sunset on the dark shores of Ometepe Island

base — or all the way to the 4,574ft summit and to the lagoon that's formed in its caldera. With the peak enshrouded in cloud, and rain forecast, Romel advises me against the ascent to the summit; we settle with the viewpoint instead.

Despite dreary weather at the top, it's a ferociously sunny day at lower elevations. Humidity seems to bounce off the dusty ground and even the initial slopes squeeze sweat from my brow like moisture from a saturated sponge. Then we make it into the forest and while the direct sunlight disappears, so too does the breeze.

A sweat patch develops and expands across Romel's back, soon darkening his entire shirt. He wears no specialised gear: his damp shirt is open at the neck, trousers are dusty, shoes battered. Aside from this, he's carrying nothing more than a water bottle. Meanwhile, I've got Vibram soles, isotonic gels, sweat-wicking materials, electrolyte-enhanced water, carabiners, quick-release straps... What for? Perhaps as a mental armour to convince myself it might be worse without them. Ahead, Romel, 10 years my senior, makes a mockery of it all as we climb.

So toxic are the emissions from the active chamber that around the vents the mountain's moisture turns to acid rain, making eerie black skeletons of trees that unwisely seeded so close to oblivion

He doesn't speak English, but perhaps because of the extra blood my heart is forcing into my skull, or more likely because he uses preschool Spanish with me, I understand most of what Romel is saying.

When the woods clear and we stand at the viewpoint, marvellous Concepción is dead ahead. "We have the pure air," says Romel. "Not like in the cities with all the cars." I breathe it in, wait until my heartbeat isn't the loudest thing in my ears, then point to Concepción. "*Muy bonito*" is all I can offer.

On the lower slopes of Maderas we'd passed enormous, charred boulders, presumably unmoved since the last time this mountain exploded. That happened 10,000 years ago, when Neanderthals roamed the Earth and the Ice Age was in its final throes. The long-term dormancy of this volcano makes Concepción's vitality all the more remarkable. That beautiful twin isn't currently smoking, but it's active and, standing at 5,280ft tall, it forms an incredibly satisfying perfect cone. If someone asked you to sketch a volcano, Concepción is what you'd draw.

It dominates the horizon, its slopes rising steeply from Ometepe's beaches, where children craft black sandcastles. On a narrow, relatively flat strip of land between the shore and the volcano proper, villages have found a way to thrive, thanks in part to route 64, which encircles Concepción —arguably the world's most spectacular ring road.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Even for those without a board, it's possible to slide down the black-sand slopes of Cerro Negro; sandboarders prepare to take the express way down; reaching the summit

I'd snatched glimpses of Concepción through the trees on the way up, but I've now got uninterrupted views. Thin clouds gently rotate around its peak, as though commanded by a spell. The narrow stretch between Maderas and Concepción volcanoes is covered in thick jungle, where, from the canopy, the orkish roars of howler monkeys are carried on the breeze.

"It's more difficult from here," says Romel, reiterating how unwise it would be to continue further up Maderas. "Too much mud. Too warm." He'll find no quarrel from me.

We instead head down the volcano to the coast. A rocky path follows a valley before emerging a breathless 45 minutes later in front of a waterfall at the bottom of a cul-de-sac of cliffs. The weather has been dry enough of late that its flow is reduced to little more than a trickle bouncing into a shallow plunge pool. Still, the lack of spray is good news for the Instagram crowd, who pose in the knee-deep water.

The gentleness of the water is also ideal for the dozens of plant species that thrive here — ferns, vines, mosses, lichens — and have made a vertical garden of the cliff faces. As peaceful as it is now, this huge hole in the side of Maderas owes its existence to some extraordinary volcanic violence and, as I start to make my way back down to sea level, I wonder if those same forces will one day destroy flawless Concepción.

The Black Mountain

From Ometepe, a 90-minute ferry crossing followed by a three-hour drive north west takes me to León, which knows as much about volcanoes as any city in the country. In 1610, when it was the colonial capital of Nicaragua, it was destroyed when nearby Momotombo erupted.

I'm thinking of this moment at breakfast, when I hear a terrible alarm, a city-wide alert like an air-raid siren. The restaurant staff seem unperturbed and I assume it's a drill for a potential eruption, but I'm told this 7am klaxon call is merely one of several chivvying civic alarm calls that sound during the working day (there are others at 9am, noon and 5.30pm).

The modern incarnation of León sits 18 miles to the west of its original site, but as is often the case in Nicaragua, moving away from one active volcano simply means moving towards another. In defence of the Spanish town planners, when the new city of León was created, the super-active Cerro Negro didn't even exist.

The volcano first appeared 15 miles north east of the city in April 1850, emerging from

It's been so dry of late that the waterfall's flow is little more than a trickle bouncing into a shallow plunge pool. Still, the lack of spray is good news for the Instagram crowd, who pose in the knee-deep water

Italy: South Tyrol
NATURAL THERAPY

Thermal springs, a Mediterranean climate and pure Alpine air — South Tyrol's serene spa town, Merano, offers soul-restoring therapeutic breaks in a fairytale setting

DON'T MISS...

1 WINE TASTING: Castello Rametz is a winery and museum around 10 minutes' drive from Merano. There's also the annual Merano WineFestival, (8-12 November 2019). *rametz.com meranowinefestival.com*

2 CONCERTS AT THE KURHAUS: One of Europe's most beautiful concert halls, the Kurhaus hosts a series of symphony concerts every year during Merano Music Weeks (19 August-20 September, 2019). *meranofestival.com*

3 HIPPODROME OF MAIA BASSA: The 40-hectare venue hosts the Haflinger horse race and the Grand Prix of Merano Forst.

Cradled by snowy peaks and nestled in a lush valley carpeted with apple orchards, olive groves and vineyards, the mountain town of Merano has a charming blend of culture, cuisine and architecture that can be easily explored on a weekend break.

The town basks in a sunny Mediterranean microclimate, enjoying cool summers and mild winters. At Trauttmansdorff Castle, exotic flowers and trees flourish among the 12 acres of botanical gardens, which are a stop on Sisi's Road — a 2,000km cultural route that passes the favourite spots of the Empress Elisabeth of Austria, who frequently visited the town for health treatments.

By the 1930s, Merano had become a famous spa destination, and today it has a number of wellness hotels. Visitors looking to stay in one of the most atmospheric should head to Castel Fragsburg, a converted 17th-century hunting lodge, now South Tyrol's smallest five-star hotel, and part of the prestigious Relais & Chateaux hotel chain. Clad with wisteria and set in the grounds of an enchanting castle, the boutique retreat has just 20 suites and mixes Mediterranean flair with Alpine charm. The hotel is famed for its Michelin-starred food, paired with award-winning South Tyrolean wines, and also features an 'alchemistic spa', where treatments involve elixirs made from organic flowers and herbs.

Guests can unwind in Castel Fragsburg's spectacular gardens or enjoy soul-restoring meditation and yoga classes in a tree hut sanctuary as the sun rises above the Dolomites' majestic jagged peaks on the horizon.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE
British Airways, Lufthansa and EasyJet fly from Gatwick and Heathrow to Valerio Catullo Airport in Verona. From there, it's two-hour drive to Castel Fragsburg. *ba.com lufthansa.com easyjet.com*

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ABOVE: The verdant slopes of Mombacho

the ground over six weeks of fraught seismic and volcanic activity. Since then, there have been 23 eruptions — the last of any significance occurring in 1999. Perhaps it's due, perhaps not, but like most volcanoes, Cerro Negro has the decency to announce its intentions with a series of earthquakes before it blows. Because of this, and because it's in a sparsely populated area a fair distance away from the city, it's not regarded as especially threatening.

Cerro Negro does look menacing, though; a treeless black dome in a wide valley populated with other, greener volcanic peaks. Many of these are extinct but Cerro Negro looks like an open sore, the insides of the Earth exposed. Nonetheless, it's still climbed daily via a trail that passes over blood-black boulders then onto a ridge of coal-like shale.

Along the volcano's rim, a stiff wind carries up the dusty slopes and whips over the edge, like a poltergeist trying to knock me off my feet. In the calmer caldera, six vents release sulphurous gasses into the warm air. Elsewhere, white ash, freshly fallen on dark sand, gives the impression of snow. Closer to the heart of the mountain, the rock has reddish, iron-rich hues.

Every step kicks up fine dust that's immediately carried away by the wind, the ground smoking in protest at each incursion. On reaching the 2,390ft summit, a chain of volcanoes is revealed to us, all in various states of geological disrepair.

If the point in being here was this view, the trek would be worth it, but Cerro Negro is also home to one of Central America's most famous adventure pursuits: sandboarding. This express way down involves sitting, or, if you fancy, attempting to stand on a wooden plank a little larger than a snowboard, then shooting down the steepest face of the young volcano. Each participant is given a boiler suit, goggles and a bandana, giving them the look of someone attending an illegal rave in the 1990s.

Being surrounded by volcanoes pulls the mind towards large thoughts, about creation and destruction, the formation of the world and amounts of time so vast as to make a person feel wholly insignificant. But watching the boarders nervously creep to the edge of the rim and then begin their wild, dusty ride to the bottom, I realise something else: for all those godlike characteristics, volcanoes can also be a lot of fun.

Underneath it all

I first came to Nicaragua as a jaded backpacker in 2011. By the time I arrived, I'd been on the road for almost a year; funds were low, my ability to feel awe diminished. Still, I made a point of visiting Masaya

LEFT: The fiery heart of the Masaya is visible almost every night

volcano, almost halfway between one of Nicaragua's former capitals, Granada, and the incumbent, Managua. On that evening, a little smoke gently puffed out of the caldera, and, once the sun had set, our group could just about discern an orange glow, reflecting off chamber walls from deep within. It was absolutely thrilling to see that far-off light.

From a distance, Masaya still looks roughly the same today, but up close things are markedly different, thanks to a significant eruption in 2012. There's no satisfying conical peak, only a complex series of chambers and vents that have been in a state of near-constant agitation for millennia. Of these, the Santiago Crater is both the most accessible and most tumultuous, sending up a permanent column of smoke that's visible from miles away. When it rains, doomed raindrops falling into the fiery core become steam, making this cloud all the larger.

As I'm driven up towards the viewing platforms on what must be the smoothest roads in Nicaragua, the sun is already low in the sky. Close to the rim, little vegetation survives in this poisonous environment; with no soil and the permanent presence of noxious fumes, only the hardiest shrubs eke out an existence.

And yet, to my amazement, there's not just flora here — I spot two thin, white horses, their prominent ribs testament to the harshness of the conditions. If these spectral beasts are an omen, it's surely not a good one.

Ignoring the strange creatures, I make my way to the edge. Since my last visit, Masaya has become altogether more hellish. The fumes aren't too pungent, but they irritate my eyes and throat as they dance up the sheer cliffs some 1,640ft before hitting the dusky sky. Each time a new pillar of smoke envelopes me, it immediately feels 10C warmer.

It's dusk — peak viewing time here on the volcano; tourist groups are each afforded five minutes to gaze at the netherworld before a whistle blows and the next lot arrive. This is partly to reduce their exposure to the volcanic vapours, but also to cope with the incredible demand.

The reason this time of day is so popular with visitors soon becomes obvious. As night falls, the orange glow from below projects further, becoming more intense as it bleeds into the gaseous tower. It's as though the galaxy is seesawing — this subterranean light rising while the celestial descends. And there, at the bottom, the source of this tremendous glow is revealed, hidden, then revealed again by the smoke. Where years before I'd seen only a faint glow, now there's a bubbling, churning lava lake; magma, our planet's unquiet blood, the sun burning underground.

ESSENTIALS

Getting there & around

There are no direct flights from the UK to Nicaragua. Delta, United and American Airlines fly from London via their various US hubs. *delta.com united.com americanairlines.co.uk*
Average flight time: 13hr
Many of Nicaragua's most spectacular volcanoes are close to major cities. From León, Granada and the capital, Managua, huge examples loom on the horizon. Many tour companies offer half- and full-day trips to volcanoes. The exception is Ometepe, which must be reached by ferry or its small airport.

When to go

The dry season — the best time to travel — runs from November-May with temperatures averaging around 25-30C, although April and May can be very hot with high humidity. During the wet season (June-October), roads can flood and many volcanoes become inaccessible.

More info

visitnicaragua.us

How to do it

GEODYSSEY offers the 15-night Nicaraguan Odyssey, which visits León and Granada, a wildlife reserve, craft villages, the Solentiname Archipelago and Ometepe. From £3,625 per person. Price includes transfers and tours but excludes international flights. *geodyssey.co.uk*

Traditional trulli houses
BELOW: Making orecchiette pasta

PUGLIA

escape to the country

The heel of Italy is a veritable rural retreat, replete with delicious cuisine and ancient landmarks

STONE MASTERPIECES

The cone-roofed *trulli* (traditional stone houses) and rustic, historic *masserie* (manor farms) are icons of the Puglian landscape. A real must when discovering Puglia is a visit to the village of Alberobello, a UNESCO World Heritage Site famed for *trulli* houses, along with ancient drystone walls.

A TASTE OF PUGLIA

With its delicate yet slightly sour taste, burrata is one of the most revered dairy products in the region. It's made by hand — a sack of *pasta filata* (spun paste) is filled with creamy cheese to create a smooth, bone-white sphere best eaten plain, or drizzled with a little extra virigin olive oil and a few leaves of freshly torn basil.

DON'T MISS

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If you're a fan of modern art, then don't miss this travelling exhibition, calling at the towns of Ostuni, Mesagne and Martina Franca. It's showcasing the creative genius of Andy Warhol through 140 of his groundbreaking, avant-garde works.

SECRETS OF NATURE

Want to experience what it's like to be a farmer for a day? Puglia has hundreds of *masserie didattiche* (educational farms) and *agrimusei* (agricultural museums), which are the perfect places for visitors to immerse themselves in Puglia's rustic way of life — somewhere to be at one with nature and to experience the hospitality of the locals. Olive groves and rugged hills become a classroom, with outdoor workshops for kids and adults — a food and sensory experience to discover the region's gastronomic heritage, such as making local *orecchiette* pasta.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE
Ryanair flies direct from Stansted to Bari. Other airlines including Alitalia, Lufthansa and Easyjet also fly to Bari and Brindisi with connections in Europe.

To find out more, visit *weareinpuglia.it*

IMAGES: RICHARD JAMES TAYLOR

All along the watchtowers

Remote, deeply rural and riddled with Cold War history, western Hungary has always been defined by its borderlands. A final frontier marked by Soviet-era observation towers finding new life in nature reserves, the region's scant population has an identity rooted firmly in its position at the edge of the map

WORDS **ADRIAN PHILLIPS**

IMAGE: NORBERT HORVATH

Two barbed wire fences stretch away in parallel from the watchtower, strung tight between concrete posts. They peter out after 100 metres, but in 1948 the barrier preventing people from escaping into Austria was 200 miles long. Those who found a way through faced a minefield crisscrossed with trip wires.

The watchtower is exactly where a man in a Hegykő hotel bar said it would be. He mentioned it in passing, without fanfare. There are no signposts on the street to point me to it: left through the gate into the farmer's field, then left again at the fork in the track made by the wheels of the farmer's tractor. I skirt a hedge and it's simply there in the cornfield: a tall, olive-green watchtower.

Flies buzz, a light breeze blows, and life goes on oblivious to this relic of history's most infamous symbol of oppression and division. Symbol's not quite the right word, of course. The Iron Curtain wasn't just the symbol of oppression and division — it was the instrument. A crude, spiky, uncompromising, deadly, very real thing.

Today, the fence and its watchtower are just features of the landscape to be ploughed around or mentioned in passing, if mentioned at all. They've been gradually absorbed into the shape of the place, like pieces of silver foil in a magpie's nest. It's a short drive to Fertőújlak and another Cold War construction that has become woven into the local fabric. What's now a nature school and visitor centre was once a barracks from which soldiers were dispatched to deal with anyone trying to defect to the West. "There were 60 men based here," says Krisztina as we survey the countryside from the hulking concrete watchtower. The land is flat and the view unhindered for miles. It must have been terrifying trying to evade the beady eyes of the guards.

Now, though, the tower is used for tracking of a different kind. Krisztina is part of the team working in Fertő-Hanság National Park, a UNESCO-listed wetland that supports more than 300 species of bird. Summer is nesting season for greylag geese; they've flown here from colder climes in the north, and there are thousands of them on Lake Fertő. "We tag some with neck rings and tracking devices so we can see where they go. We recently discovered one goose was being unfaithful — he left his family here and nipped off to Italy for a few days!"

Unlike Communist times, this is a surveillance project conducted hand in hand with Hungary's Western neighbours, because Lake Fertő straddles the border. Three-quarters of its 200sq miles lie in Austria, where it goes by the name of Lake Neusiedl. The Hungarian title is more fitting, meaning 'swamp': a reference to the sediment carried by currents flowing down the lake. It's a constant battle to prevent the southern end from silting up and starving the wildlife of oxygen. So, barriers are still set and trenches are still dug, now in the cause of conservation rather than containment.

We leave the tower and make our way to Borsodi, one of several shallow offshoots along the shore of the main lake. On the air is the gentle honking of countless geese that carpet the surface. It's rather soothing. But then the honks become animated and urgent, and hundreds of birds lift like smoke above the reeds and fly across the sky ahead before dropping and settling again. "They must have spotted an eagle or fox," explains Krisztina. She scans the geese with her binoculars. "This is not so many. You should come in winter — last year there were 70,000."

Grazing a meadow to our right is a flock of Racka sheep, an odd-looking Hungarian

IMAGES: ADRIAN PHILLIPS; KUGLER PÉTER; FHNP ARCHIVE; GODA ISTVÁN

PREVIOUS PAGE: Lake Fertő, Fertő-Hanság National Park
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Fertő-Hanság National Park: barbed wire fences near Hegykő village; reedbeds, Lake Fertő; bird-viewing platform; herd of Racka sheep

breed with sharp, spiralling horns that would do a unicorn proud. We pick our way across the scrubby grassland, over clumps of prickly sea holly and past the fluffy rounded flower heads of sheep's-bit, grey-blue like gun barrels, until we reach a hole in the sandy soil. A breathy whistle comes from inside. This is the burrow of a European ground squirrel, which lives here at the very western limit of its range. The colony feeds on insects during the day while sentinels stand upright and alert, ready to whistle a warning should a saker falcon pass by on patrol overhead.

"An escape tunnel," says Krisztina, crouching at another hole nearby. "It's much steeper, like a lift shaft, so the squirrels can take cover quickly." When they dig a burrow, the animals scatter the earth away from the entrance so it's less conspicuous to predators. I'm reminded of a scene in the film *The Great Escape*, when the prisoners of war disperse soil from their own tunnels by dropping it down the inside of their trouser legs as they walk around the exercise yard. "But birds of prey have special vision and can see urine in the soil. When a buzzard hovers, it's looking for fresh pee, which is a tell-tale sign there's a squirrel nearby."

In the distance, spoonbills trawl the edge of the water with their beaks, zigzagging back and forth with heads bent low like a pack of sniffer dogs. Little egrets bayonet frantically in the shallows and herons stand still, staring, waiting for the moment to strike. This is a landscape of air-borne surveillance and tracking systems, sentries and tunnels, strategies for capture and strategies for evasion. The competing claims of the hunted and the hunter run through it like words in a stick of rock. I shall pass. You will not pass.

Edging off the map

That afternoon, we take to the water itself with Norbert, a colleague of Krisztina. He leads ecotours in the park but, with his camouflage cap and dark glasses, he also does a decent impression of a commando on a mission. Reed beds blanket most of the Hungarian end of Lake Fertő, and so, over the centuries, the locals have cut a network of waterways to get around. Thick green stems form a guard of honour, creaking and whispering at the wind as it funnels through the narrow channel. I watch Norbert sitting quiet and chisel-jawed at the wheel of the solar-powered boat and ponder: how un-Norbert-like he looks.

"Around here, you'll either hear the wind, the rain or the church bells," he says, breaking his silence with something altogether more poetic than I'd expected.

In the distance, spoonbills trawl the edge of the water with their beaks, zigzagging back and forth with heads bent low like a pack of sniffer dogs

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:
Solar-powered boat on Lake Fertő; northern lapwing; great egret; bearded reedling; black-winged stilt

IMAGES: NORBERT HORVATH; PELLINGER ATTILA

No one lives quite like this anymore, of course, but the Őrség remains a step removed, a link between modern Hungary and a disappearing yesteryear

Half a dozen night herons squat uneasily at the top of an acacia tree as the branches lurch in the air's currents. "The wind has a big effect, pushing the water around. Sometimes the lake can be 80cm higher at one end than the other." As we reach open water at the mouth of the channel and get a brief glimpse of the Austrian Alps in the distance, the wind sends a steady stream of khaki-coloured waves towards the boat and whips our coats with spray. We beat a hasty retreat into the reeds.

On the return journey, Norbert nods towards the black silhouette of yet another watchtower, elegant and menacing against the sunset. "We have to control the wild boar population. These days, that tower is used to spot them — and shoot them." But in days past it was used to spot defectors — and almost certainly to shoot them. "Around 17,000 people died trying to cross the border," says Norbert, quietly. This was an area at the bleeding edge of history.

I've assumed until now it was a sharp edge, a line between two tectonic plates of 20th-century ideology, precisely dividing one nation from another. I've assumed the citizens near the border — whether paid-up party members or Western sympathisers — were just those whose noses were closest to the glass, with uninterrupted geography at their backs. But I've assumed wrong.

"A buffer zone ran along the inside of the border during the communist period," explains Albert when I meet him next day in Szalafő village, 90 minutes further south in the Őrség region. "It was miles wide, and if you didn't live there you needed permission to enter, even to visit a relative." So, the people here were sandwiched between borders west and east; they didn't exist at the edge, but within it. A hinterland folk.

In truth, this was a population that had always been set apart. The Őrség — which means 'guard' — was settled in the 10th century by Hungary's bravest fighters, who were posted there to protect the kingdom against invaders from the west. In return, they were granted special privileges and spared from serfdom. Theirs was a unique status. More than 1,000 years on, many of today's villagers are direct descendants of those settlers, and they're fiercely proud of their heritage. "They still keep watch," says Zsófia. "They'll have noticed there's a red car here today that they haven't seen before."

Husband and wife, Albert and Zsófia are showing me around Pityerszer, one of seven tiny hamlets that together make up the village of Szalafő. "Each village was built across several hilltops so the residents could use smoke signals to alert each other if enemies were approaching," says Zsófia. Pityerszer is now an open-air museum, but there were families occupying its handful of dwellings as recently as the 1970s. We stoop through a door into the most rudimentary of living spaces, with mud walls and a chair crudely fashioned from scraps of wood. There's no running water, electric lighting or gas for cooking. There's no chimney either: smoke from the fire had to escape through a hole above the door the size of a letterbox. This was medieval living in the 20th century.

No one lives quite like this anymore, of course, but the Őrség remains a step removed, a link between modern Hungary and a disappearing yesteryear. "Sometimes people from Budapest move here because they like the idea of a simpler life," says Albert. "But they soon return home." They tire of silence and the night's darkness, of chopping their own kindling and waiting, waiting for the wood-fire oven to warm. And waiting too for the locals to warm to them, for this is a close-knit community with their own words for things and their own folk tales of ancestral derring-do. They've no interest in the bright lights of the capital just two-and-a-half hours away — indeed, as many as 90% of them have never even been there.

Albert and Zsófia are rare outsiders who have been embraced as honorary Őrség people. They relocated around a decade ago from Lake Balaton, which is 70 miles to the east, and work for the national park. "It takes time for the locals to accept newcomers — but once they do, they'll look out for you forever," says Zsófia.

And this is a forever sort of place. I'd driven through one-street villages, past sunflower fields that rolled like yellow tides towards roadsides where storks nested messily on telegraph poles. Albert loves the meadows and its butterflies. "There's dew on the grass in August. You don't get that anywhere else in Hungary," he says.

But there's no guarantee this forever place will last forever. Young people are leaving for city jobs and comforts — "They're lazy!" grumbles a friendly old lady who's come to see what we're up to, presumably after spotting my car — and ancient skills are slipping away. "We needed to repair a roof in Pityerszer, but it took ages to find someone who knew how to thatch the authentic Őrség

IMAGES: ADRIAN PHILLIPS

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Margit's weaved baskets; Zsuzsa working the loom; embroidery; the cotton in the handloom

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way," says Albert. "We couldn't even get the right sort of rye," adds Zsófia. "Modern rye is much shorter than it used to be." The 21st-century challenge for these hinterland people, it seems, is to protect the traditions that tie them to their ancestors. To ensure they will not pass.

Weaving stories

Today's guardians aren't on hilltops or in watchtowers, but behind net curtains, armed with needle and thread. The following morning, I drive 20 miles south and knock on the door of a house in the village of Lenti. It's answered by Zsuzsa, who shows me into a front room, which is dominated by what looks like a four-poster bed hung with a mad array of handles, pullies and paddles.

It's a domestic handloom, 140 years old, eight feet tall and eight feet across. Zsuzsa takes her place at the end like a pianist at a grand piano, and launches into a vigorous demonstration, pulling on strings, working pedals and throwing the shuttle back and forth across 1,400 strands of cotton that have taken two days to thread into the loom. Draped all about the room are white shawls and cushion covers, each delicately woven with crimson motifs. "The patterns are inspired by nature — stars, birds, flowers," Zsuzsa tells me. She sells her wares at markets and festivals, and even takes orders online. "The designs are simple, which fits with current tastes. People like things made by hand." I watch as the loom rocks and shakes and thwacks, just as it would have done in generations past.

"Young people love it. They're tired of artificial stuff," Margit explains, when I call into her stone-walled workshop, set in a garden a few streets away. Roses trail through trellises and a cat sleeps on a chair beneath a cherry tree. The chair is handmade of wicker, of course; it couldn't be anything else. "When I was a girl, I worked in the fields," Margit tells me, as she selects some willow twigs from a bundle. "It was tough and hot. One day, I saw some people making baskets in the shade. 'Sod the fields,' I thought. That was about 50 years ago and I've been basket weaving ever since."

Margit sits in front of a basket she's already started. Twigs splay upwards in a ring from the base, and she bends new ones in and out between them, karate chopping them snug down against the layer beneath. She's in her 70s, but her fingers move like lightning. "Skip two and weave around. Skip

IMAGES: ADRIAN PHILLIPS

two and weave around," she says as I have a go, my fingers moving slowly and clumsily, as if they were sausages. We're surrounded by baskets big and small, round and square. I've never considered the aesthetics of a basket before, but these are beautiful, the willow glossy and ranging in shade from chocolate to caramel. You almost want to lick them. "There's no paint or staining — it's all natural wood."

If anything serves as a statement of defiance in the face of the disposable nature of the modern world, it's the Őrség Fair in the village of Őriszentpéter. This is the annual smoke signal to rally tradition's guardians, and it happens to coincide with the final day of my trip. I cross a bridge over a creek to a field packed with stalls selling handmade products. Tables of golden honey give way to tables of pressed oils — pumpkin seed, grape seed, poppy seed and more. A man insists I try his fruit brandy, and I move on with heat in my chest, to charcoal pits where sausages sizzle in pans and chimney cakes turn on spits. Beyond, craftspeople are ranged along the village high street, displaying everything from lace and pottery to blown glass.

But it's 2pm and there's something I don't want to miss. I take a seat in front of a raised stage just as the performers appear. A paunchy man in a black waistcoat and a pork pie hat is joined by six ladies, who line up and take a bow. I look out for Zsófia and there she is, very different from two days ago in a long green skirt and frilly white blouse, her hair plaited and tied with a red ribbon. The music starts, a jaunty tune, and the dancers are off. They link arms and wheel in circles, flicking their heels, stepping daintily and high-kneed in time to the violin. This is a *csárdás*, a traditional folk dance that tells of village life and courtship.

Zsófia had told me that the Őrség Fair was a watershed moment when she and Albert arrived here: "Before, we were outsiders. After we'd taken part, I was a real Őrség lady." The music speeds up, and the dancers chant and whoop, their skirts whirling around them. The paunchy gent performs a slightly comical solo, clicking his heels and raising his arms aloft, and Zsófia is pink-cheeked and laughing. "I came to the Őrség for the freedom of it," she'd said, and I didn't really understand. But now I do. It's liberating to be tied to the past, comradely to float free as a group from the rest. This hinterland space in the shadow of the watchtowers is somewhere worth fiercely guarding.

PREVIOUS PAGE FROM TOP: Dressmaker's shop, Győr; flowers, Őrség Fair
LEFT: Locals dancing the csárdás, Őrség Fair

ESSENTIALS

Getting there & around

British Airways, EasyJet and Wizz Air all fly direct to Budapest from various UK airports. You can also drive from Austria into western Hungary; Vienna is about an hour by road. *ba.com easyjet.com wizzair.com*
Average flight time: 2hr 45min.
Car rental is available from FOX Autorent, which has outlets in Budapest, Lake Balaton and Vienna. *foxautorent.com*

When to go

Geese gather in large numbers on Lake Fertő in spring and autumn, when temperatures average around 16C. The Őrség Fair takes at the end of June.

Where to stay

Onyx Sárvár. *onyxsarvar.hu*
Hotel Sopron. *hotelsopron.hu*
Hotel Tornácos. *tornacos.hu*
Ritz-Carlton, Budapest. *ritzcarlton.com*
Hotel Moments, Budapest. *hotelmomentsbudapest.hu*
Hotel Parlament, Budapest. *parlament-hotel.hu*

Places mentioned

Fertő-Hanság National Park. *ferto-hansag.hu*
Őrség National Park. *orsegnemzetipark.hu*
Village Museum. *T: 00 36 94 548 034.* Őrség Fair. *oriszentpeter.hu*

More info

Hungary (Bradt Travel Guides). RRP: £15.99

How to do it

PROBIRDER offers a one-week trip, with two nights in Budapest and four nights in the Fertő-Hanság and Őrség regions, including accommodation, from £880 per person. Excludes flights. *probirder.com*

IMAGE: ILONA KEMENCEI. ILLUSTRATION: JOHN PLUMER

vigilius mountain resort

AN ISLAND ON A MOUNTAIN

Nearly 5,000ft above sea level, the views from vigilius mountain resort stretch out across the Dolomites. It's the ideal place to unwind, surrounded by nature

The vigilius mountain resort is located on the Vigiljoch mountain pass, close to the town of Lana, just under five miles from Merano. From here, incredible views stretch out across the Adige Valley, with the Dolomites on the horizon. The resort is an island in the mountains, a modernist hotel that exists in harmony with nature. Here are just a few reasons to visit.

LOCAL CUISINE REIGNS SUPREME

Restaurant 1500 is overseen by executive chef Filippo Zoncato, who has worked in a number of Michelin- starred restaurants. He uses simple ingredients to make delicious, balanced dishes. The second restaurant, Stube ida, offers delicious down-to-earth cooking with a modern South Tyrolean twist.

THE SOUND OF SILENCE

There are no roads up to Mountain San Vigilio; a seven-minute cable-car is the only way guests can get there from Lana. The resort invites guests to relax and enjoy their time up in the mountains. It's more than just a holiday destination: it's a place of creativity, inspiration and tranquillity. And that makes it perfect for retreats as well as creative workshops, all in an extra-special setting.

NATURE SETS THE TONE

Famed architect Matteo Thun designed the vigilius mountain resort according to his environmental principles. It's a refuge where nature is in charge. The dominant materials used in the resort's construction were larch wood, glass, natural stone (silver quartzite) and clay. Untreated wood was used on the exterior of the building and can also be found throughout the interior too.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE

The best way to get to South Tyrol is via Innsbruck. Both Easyjet and British Airways fly there from several UK airports including London and Manchester. From there, it's easy to organise a rental car, train or bus on to South Tyrol.

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mountain resort. simply: be.

To find out more, visit *vigilius.it*

THAILAND

OSTENSIBLY THE BORDER BETWEEN THAILAND AND LAOS, THE MEKONG RIVER SERVES MORE AS A THREAD CONNECTING THE TWO CULTURES, MAKING IT A COMPLEX AND FASCINATING PROSPECT FOR VISITORS, FAR FROM THE BUSY STREETS OF BANGKOK

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS **MARK PARREN TAYLOR**

The Mekong is the lifeblood of many towns along its length, including Renu Nakhon and Nakhon Phanom. The former is home to the stunning temple of Wat Prathat Renu Nakhon, where local girls perform traditional '*baisri*' dances. Nakhon Phanom is a busy market town with a sizeable Vietnamese community — Ho Chi Minh lived here in the 1920s and the local cuisine includes dishes such as *banh cuon* (steamed rice rolls) and *maeng tup* (fried woodborer beetle).

From the top of Chanadai cliff in Pha Taem National Park, the view stretches across the floodplain to the Mekong and all the way to Laos on the other side of the river. Pha Taem is home to 3,000-year-old rock art, rolling flower meadows and rock gardens that teem with delicate miniature orchids.

Ban Pa Ao village — near the city of Ubon Ratchathani in the southeast of the Isan region — is renowned for its silk weavers and brass foundry. On religious days, villagers gather at the local temple where teams of celebrants clean, cook communal lunches and assemble colourful votive offerings.

Songkran (Thai New Year) sees locals of all ages cruising around Nakhon Phanom picking light-hearted water fights with passersby — the water is believed to wash away sins. During the three days of Songkran, Wat Phra That Phanom (rumoured to be the home of Buddha's breastbone), is outfitted with an elaborate rig that douses the structure with 'lustral water'.

As the sun begins to rise, a fisherman plies the waters of the Mekong near Nakhon Phanom. This famed river brims with life: tilapia, crab, shrimp, carp, and the critically endangered giant catfish. In the distance, the hills of Laos stand silhouetted against the sky. Despite Nakhon Phanom meaning 'city of mountains', there are no hills on the Thai side of the border — it's an enduring name that recalls a time when the two countries were one.

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City life

BEIJING

From factories turned into galleries to a burgeoning crop of sci-fi skyscrapers, the Chinese capital is shrugging off its dynastic past and revealing a cool side

WORDS: *Chris Leadbeater* **PHOTOGRAPHS:** *Giulia Marchi*

“I hope you’re hungry,” Evon Chua says with a laugh that sweeps away any suggestion the tour will be a formal affair. “Because we have a lot to get through tonight. A lot.” Hovering at the top of the escalator when I emerge from the belly of Yonghegong Lama Temple subway station, Evon waves and introduces herself, all youthful confidence and stylish demeanour. She’s clad in a coat that, while padded with layers to protect her from Beijing’s evening chill, is faultlessly cool.

For the next four hours, Evon will be my window on a city that sometimes seems wrapped in an unrelenting chill — in politics as much as weather. Where we’re standing — the main subway stop for the Beixinqiao district — we’re just three miles from the Forbidden City, from which imperial dynasties ruled with absolute power until 1912. We’re only metres further from Tiananmen Square, where the Chinese international image was doused in its own blood in 1989. Has much changed? The Beijing Olympics of 2008 was meant to be the event that saw China cosy up to the rest of the globe. But at a time when the increasingly autocratic Xi Jinping has a firm grip on the presidential reins, the country can still appear, to an outsider, to be the unsmiling titan of the Far East.

An unfair preconception? Perhaps. The Chinese capital is a kaleidoscope of 22 million souls, and Evon has much of it at her fingertips. Unfailingly fluent in English, and tech-savvy to the point her smartphone is almost a fifth limb — the ping of her WeChat feed (China’s near-omnipresent micro-messaging app) will echo across the evening — she’s about to show me a Beijing far removed from stereotype. One that’s vibrant, arty, full of secrets, very happy to stay out late and — more to the point, here in Beixinqiao — tasty.

Evon is a guide for Lost Plate Food Tours, a company set up in Xi’an as recently as 2014 that’s since expanded into the other Chinese cities of Beijing, Chengdu and Shanghai. The concept is simple: engaging jaunts that pick out intriguing eateries and bars, and unveil the authentic China in the process. “We take people to places they might not usually consider,” she explains. “Not restaurants in hotels — they can find those themselves. We go through the doors they might otherwise ignore, or look into but not feel sure about. We take you inside and show you the best things to eat.” She’ll be true to her word. Nine of us — including an American-Serbian couple from Boston and an Australian family — cram into three tuk-tuks for an odyssey that will crisscross the north edge of the centre of the city. These doughty pedal-powered relics will be the sole concession to the China of cliches. They’ll take us to institutions far removed from postcards and travel brochures; there’s Ju En Yuan, where we order *chun bing* (spring pancakes) filled with chicken, and Xiong Wei Shi Zu, where the *re gan mian* (hot, dry noodles) has the group gobbling, sighing and talking animatedly over empty bowls.

These are hole-in-the-wall nuggets and Evon, aware that I’ve come to Beijing to write about the city, requests that I don’t reveal their names for fear of others bypassing Lost Plates to follow the route independently. For the most part, it’s a moot betrayal to ‘identify’ them, since most are so hidden in the city’s back-alley neighbourhoods — the *hutongs* — that it’s implausible for visitors to the city to locate them without her help.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Wall painted with Chinese character ‘jing’ (symbolising respect, honour), Wangfujing
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Datianshuijing food street; local restaurant; plastic food, Datianshuijing food street; candied fruit, Nanluoguxiang

Size matters *// Beijing is the world’s third-most populous city — and the second-largest in China after Shanghai — with a population of almost 22 million people living within its limits*

福
允许拼桌
冰淇淋
奶茶

Forbidden fruit *// The city has seven World Heritage Sites — including the Forbidden City, which UNESCO describes as 'a priceless testimony to Chinese civilisation'*

INSIDER TIPS

Foreign visitors need to show their passport to buy entry tickets at the Forbidden City.

The 'Versailles of the Far East', cocooned within two miles of walls, was home to both the Ming and Qing Dynasties between 1420 and 1912. The Hall of Supreme Harmony, where coronations were held, has lost none of its ornate majesty. *dpm.org.cn*

The Chinese version of Uber — DiDi — is the dominant taxi-hailing app in Beijing. It can be calibrated for use in English, with a British credit card. *didiglobal.com*

They pulse with life all the same. Yi Dian Xin Jin Wei greets us with a haze of smoke. When my eyes adjust, I grasp that the restaurant deals in *zhi zi kao rou* (Mongolian barbecue), and is abuzz with Beijing twentysomethings cooking chunks of meat on hot plates on the tables. "This is a hippy-ish hang-out," Evon explains. "Young people love to come here for unfussy food and beer." Around me, the conversation is a rolling sea of Mandarin, far beyond the limit of my paltry vocabulary. I let it wash over me as the beef course sizzles.

We end the tour in Peiping Machine Taphouse, a microbrewery in a former factory where hippy is replaced by hipster, and the fug of steak is substituted for 5.1% wheat beers, stripped brick walls and sharp haircuts — gentrification's calling-card, in all its familiarity. It's an alliance with modernity that's also noticeable in Wangfujing, the shopping district at the city's core. Walking here on a Saturday, I'm much nearer to Tiananmen Square, a little over a mile from the mausoleum where Mao Zedong has glared across the plaza in formaldehyde-eternity since 1977. But the distance feels chasmic in the weekend hubbub — as young Beijing flits in and out of the neon-fronted stores on the main pedestrian drag.

There are Western brands aplenty here, devotees gathered in the glow of their ubiquitous logos. A conga line of teenagers trips down the steps of Dongan Department Store, bags of clothes and trainers knocking at their legs. Four student-age men laugh on a bench opposite. And if some sort of generation gap is visible in the side-alley of Datianshujing — where a street-food market revels in delicacies like grilled scorpions on skewers, and the clientele is discernibly older — then youth reasserts itself inside Wangfujing Bookstore.

Xi is present within — the president's newest tome of political musings propped on the first promotional display beyond the door. But no-one who enters pauses to peruse it. Instead, they barrel giddily down the stairs into the basement, which is stuffed with eateries. I squeeze into one of the few available seats at Funiutang, a noodle bar, order the house speciality with beef (which is spicy and filling), and watch the swirl of commerce around me — the incessant changeover of customers at adjacent tables, the merry roar of chatter, the waft of an arm as yet another meal is paid for with the swipe of a smartphone.

UPCOMING ART

Two blocks to the east, the towering Peninsula hotel looks, at first glance, like it belongs to the austere Beijing of repute. In some senses, it does. It opened in 1989, an aeon ago in a metropolis that knocks down and rebuilds with ruthless abandon. But after a discreet renovation of its own, it has embraced the city's vivacious undercurrents. Its vast lobby is awash with work by Chinese artists: a bronze sculpture of a grandfatherly figure drinking green tea by Zhang Du; pale, slender statues bowing at the viewer — maybe in deference, maybe curiosity — by Gao Xiaowu. Downstairs, by the spa, a small gallery hosts rotating displays of work by local creatives. "I always endeavour to be outgoing as an artist, and I'm always keen to try new ways of communication," Gao explains when I meet him at his studio in the north-east of the conurbation. "The exhibition spaces at the Peninsula are special. They're different from commercial

LEFT: Gao Xiaowu outside his studio

galleries — they draw in people who really enjoy what they're looking at."

"The Beijing art scene has really been built in the last 20 years," he continues. "At first, it grew in pockets, because artists like me wanted to work in groups. But in the last five years, it's spread across the city. Artists are more versatile. They look for new ways to express their creativity." The proof of his statement is there in areas such as Jianchang Hutong — where Arrow Factory shows off installations in a former shop — and in nightlife hub Sanlitun, where galleries have started to appear amid the bars. The Opposite House, a recent hotel addition to the district whose sleek facade of green and yellow glass is almost an artwork in itself, displays contemporary works in its atrium.

It's tricky to find an area of central Beijing that doesn't have a palpable buzz. When I visit the fashionable locale Nanluoguxiang, with its bars, restaurants and trendy shops, it's a blur of young shoppers diving into the boutiques: there's Shengtang Peony with its silk scarves and Make Happy, which sells genteel necklaces. Cafe 16mm, meanwhile, has antique film projectors dotted around its interior. I buy a flat white and eavesdrop on the lovebirds in the next booth, marvelling at how the mannerisms of an argument transcend all language.

The couple in front of me in the National Art Museum the day after are in a happier zone. They're silent amid the flurry of Sunday in this busy museum — trundling pushchairs, crying toddlers. She has her head on his shoulder as they admire a canvas by Xiao He — a folk painting that peers back to that traditional, pastoral China where flowers flutter and branches hang low. Their grandparents might have fitted that landscape. They don't. As they turn away, they resemble smart, cool visitors from another galaxy; all future, no past.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Street performer, Datianshuijing; Nanluoguxiang; Peiping Machine Taphouse

Q&A: Katja Loher, creator of Seeds of Life at The Opposite House

WHAT MAKES THE BEIJING ART SCENE UNIQUE?

It's so energetic — perfect for artistic exploration, with lots of interaction and dialogue between Beijing/China and the wider global art world. I love dynamic young artists like Ye Funa and Cui Jie, and local art galleries like Long March Space in the 798 Art Zone, and White Space in Caochangdi Art District.

WHAT'S YOUR CURRENT WORK ABOUT?

Seeds of Life came about by talking to artists from Beijing. I worked with local dancers to choreograph video sculptures involving the five spirits of the five Chinese elements: wood, fire, earth, metal and water.

WHERE'S YOUR FAVOURITE PLACE TO HANG OUT?

I base myself in the Sanlitun district, which feels very young and vibrant — so many cool young people dressed creatively, and the city's most happening restaurants and bars are here, too. I love Mesh, the bar at The Opposite House, not least because the mixologist team there created cocktails inspired by the five elements featured in my artwork.

WHERE IN BEIJING INSPIRES YOU THE MOST?

The Great Wall is the ultimate place to experience China's ancient architecture and history. It makes me think of an anaconda descending from the sky, a representation of the origin of life on Earth. I also find inspiration in the city's old *hutongs* (alleys) and in the CCTV building by Rem Koolhaas, where you can really see the contrast between the new and old worlds.

14 hours in BEIJING

10AM

BRUNCH AT THE ORCHID

A boutique retreat with a small garden, The Orchid is a fine spot to rest your head if you want to stay in the direct vicinity of Nanluoguxiang and its shops (double rooms from £129, with breakfast). But it's worth visiting even if you don't need a bed. It's known for its brunches. Go for the Avocado Rocket Ship (poached egg with rocket salad, avocado and red peppers) costs 68 yuan (£7.60), which proffers a light start to the day. *theorchidbeijing.com*

11AM

SHOPPING ON NANLUOGUXIANG

This alluring shopping district is festooned with retail delights. Plastered T-shirts splices fashion, digital art and graffiti in its clever design; adjacent music store M.F deals in international and Chinese artists, with a smattering of vinyl. If you feel the need for a shot of caffeine and perhaps a snack, Voyage Coffee, a little off the main drag at Beiluoguxiang 80, is a cosy spot to take the weight off your feet and catch your breath. *plasteredtshirts.com*

12PM

GET ARTY

Beijing's flagship art gallery lies an easy one-mile walk to the south of Nanluoguxiang. It focuses, not unexpectedly, on Chinese artists — including the likes of Gao Hongxiao and Wang Yexiang — while staging temporary exhibitions that change on a regular basis. For a more contemporary contrast, try 798 Art Zone, an area of east central Beijing where galleries such as the pack-leading Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (aka UCCA) occupy decommissioned factory buildings. *namoc.org 798district.com ucca.org.cn*

1.30PM

TIANANMEN SQUARE & BEYOND

Dip into the traditional Beijing that fans out below the Forbidden City. Deyuan Roast Duck, 10 minutes' walk south-west of Tiananmen Square, is a local favourite. What it lacks in sophistication it makes up

for in atmosphere and tasty cuts of poultry and mutton (from 35 yuan [£4]). Once you've scoffed your fill, retrace your path to the city's main plaza. You don't need to go into the Mausoleum of Mao Zedong to see that it holds pride of place, but you may wish to enter the National Museum of China, which covers the country's history up to the close of the royal era. *Deyuan Roast Duck, 57 Dashilan, Xijie. chnmuseum.cn*

3PM

FORBIDDEN CITY VIEWS

A visit to the Versailles of the Far East is a must, the magisterial home of both the Ming and Qing dynasties between 1420 and 1912, cocooned within two miles of walls. At the very least, head to central Jingshan Park for its incredible hilltop views over the Forbidden City, and join in with early morning sessions of tai chi or *jiànzi* (a shuttlecock-kicking game). *dpm.org.cn*

6PM

SOUTHERN STYLE DINING

Dali Courtyard, down a series of alleys off Nanluoguxiang, has a low key, leafy setting recalling the laid-back southern province of Yunnan, the featured cuisine. The prix fixe menu puts you at the mercy of the chef: a good thing, with standouts including *ru bing* (grilled goat cheese), spicy Yunnan-style dumplings, *ye cai* (fried shrimp and stir-fried wild vegetables), and myriad mushroom dishes for which Yunnan is famed. *67 Xiaojingchang Hutong, Gulou Dongdajie, Dongcheng District. T: 00 86 10 8404 1430.*

8.30PM

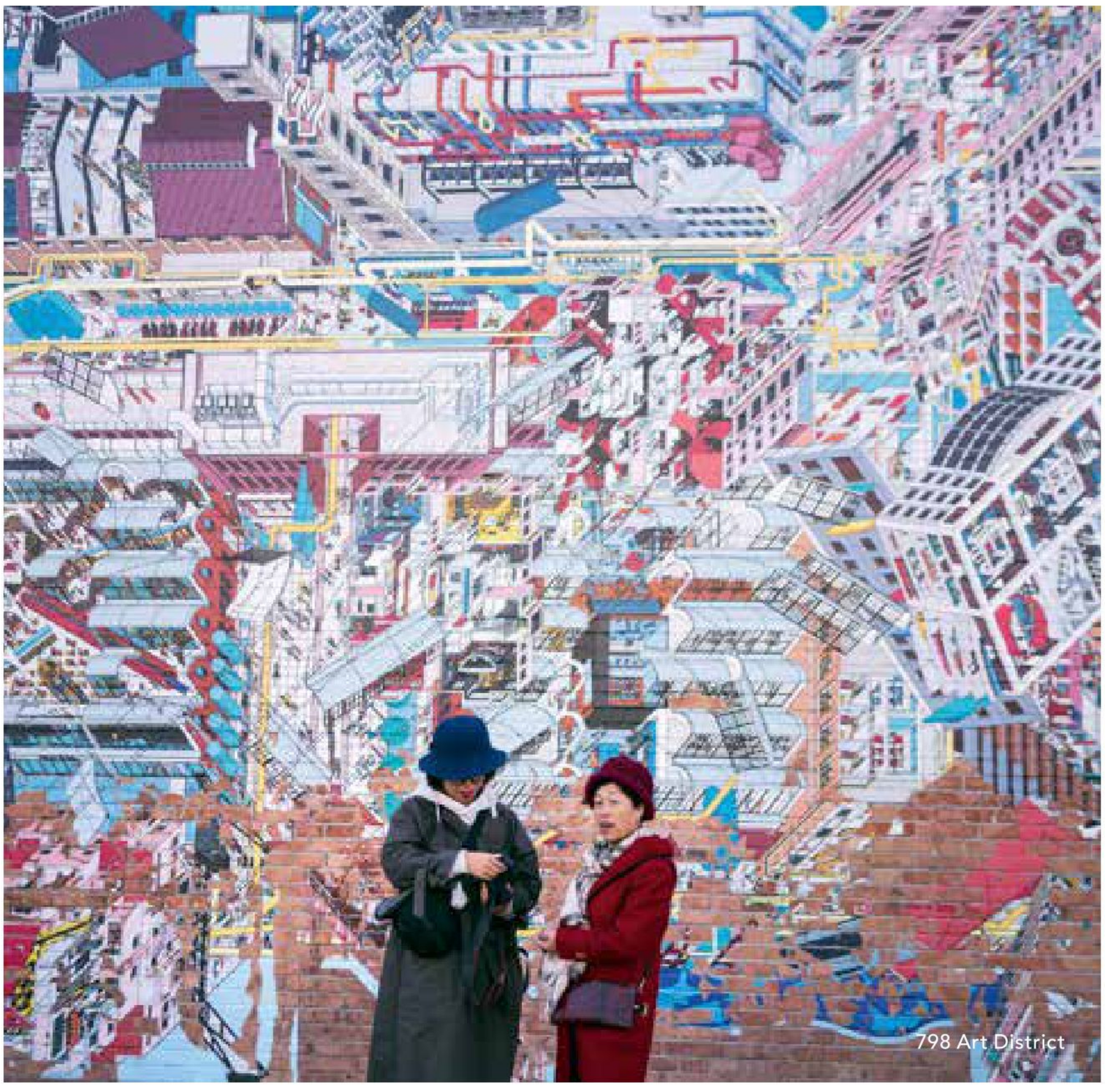
JIANCHANG HUTONG

A three-mile cab ride north of the Dengshikou subway station, Jianchang Hutong is one of the city's prime nightlife areas. Check out Arrow Factory Taproom, one of the stars of the city's craft beer scene, with beers from 28 yuan (£3). If, incredibly, you're still hungry, grab something quick at adjacent Stuff'd, which delights in sausages, such as the paprika-heavy, chorizo-fest that is The Siesta (30 yuan/£3.30). *arrowfactorybrewing.com stuff-d.com*

10PM

COCKTAILS IN SANLITUN

Many a Beijing night ends in Sanlitun, the north-easterly district that sings with hip watering holes. Infusion Room is a case in point — a speakeasy-style joint where the spirit racks rise as a pyramid behind the bar, and cocktails cost from 110 yuan (£12). Nearby, Janes + Hooch plays a similar game, with a mixology menu that changes by the month. Both stay open until 2am. *facebook.com/infusionroombeijing janeshooch.com*



798 Art District

ESSENTIALS

Getting there & around

British Airways and Air China offer the sole direct flights between the UK and Beijing — both from Heathrow. *ba.com airchina.co.uk*
Average flight time: 9hr 50min
Consisting of 22 lines, the Beijing Subway is the easiest way of getting around the city (although there are some gaps in the centre). Tickets from 3 yuan (34p). *mtr.bj.cn/en*
The quickest way from plane to city centre is the Airport Express rail link, which runs to Dongzhimen subway stop. Journeys from 16 minutes, depending on terminal; 25 yuan (£3).

When to go

Beijing's winters (November-March) can be fierce, with temperatures hovering around freezing. Summer averages around 30C. April and May are warm and pleasant.

More information

Lost Plate Food Tours. *lostplate.com*
China National Tourist Office *cnto.org.uk*
The Rough Guide to Beijing, by David Leffman. RRP £12.99.
Lum Dim Sum — a Beijing-based blog (in English) with a food focus: *lumdimsum.com*
The Beijinger — a wide-ranging website crammed with local information: *thebeijinger.com*

How to do it

COX & KINGS offers four-night stays at the Peninsula Beijing, with flights, transfers and a half-day trip to the Great Wall (Mutianyu section), from £1,690 per person. *coxandkings.co.uk*

ILLUSTRATION: JOHN PLUMER

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City life

SEATTLE

Today, the restless, rain-drenched birthplace of grunge and Starbucks is home to artists, creatives, geeks and iconoclasts. It also boasts natural assets galore, from Puget Sound's islets to two mountain ranges ripe for exploration

WORDS: *James Draven* **PHOTOGRAPHS:** *Wesley Verhoeve*

"And I will always love you-oo-oo," comes a crumpled voice, bouncing off the buildings of the gritty, hipster, Belltown neighbourhood. I round the corner to its source: the side entrance of The Crocodile, a live music venue that became an icon of the city's grunge scene. Pacing by the door is a punk-looking woman in her late 20s with a finger stuffed into an ear. She's trying to hit Whitney Houston's highest notes, but can't quite get there; her voice cracks and she starts cursing. As I pass her and head inside, she shoots me a suspicious sideways glance.

The bar's dimly lit backroom is crammed with drag artists in sequinned gowns, groups of bespectacled young women sporting crew cuts and fishermen's jumpers, and a few elderly gents dressed like 1970s TV pimps — complete with indoor sunglasses and canes topped with golden dollar signs. All are waiting for their turn to belt out a pop tune or an '80s power ballad as part of a regional karaoke competition.

It's not what I was expecting to find at this rock venue. When I arrive at my hotel later, I find the words 'Seattle Doesn't Settle' emblazoned on the wall, a self-referential nod to the city's ephemeral spirit. The only constants here are the landmark Space Needle observation tower, and heavy rainfall.

The profile of this geographically removed city, tucked away on a finger of land in the top-left corner of the US, soared in the early '90s, when it was the screen home of a neurotic psychiatrist called Frasier Crane and an insomniac Tom Hanks, and a trio of local names — Nirvana, Starbucks and Microsoft — went global. It evolved quickly from an industrial hub to a burgeoning rock city populated by software giants, aerospace companies and espresso-fuelled hipsters.

But restless Seattle refuses to be defined by its former glories; it's always been a confidently off-kilter city, full of artists, creatives, geeks and iconoclasts who are unafraid to bend the rules, subvert the mainstream, and elevate the underground.

Seattle's myriad neighbourhoods jostle for the crown of countercultural cool too, from boho-meets-boutique Capitol Hill, to artsy, self-proclaimed 'Center of the Universe', Fremont. Elliott Bay, meanwhile, is filled with boatloads of yachties, while tech behemoths erect their gleaming, Brobdingnagian bases downtown. Seattle is an offbeat city at heart, but it belts out some crowd-pleasing hits.

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PREVIOUS PAGES: Biscuit Bitch
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Local artist Victor in the hidden Pike Place Market; Gas Works Park; lobby, Hotel Max

At Hotel Max, a signed bass that belonged to Nirvana's Krist Novoselic hangs in the lobby, while rooms on the Sub Pop floor — where Charles Peterson's iconic grunge photography adorns the doors — feature bedside turntables

SEE & DO

MUSEUM OF POP CULTURE: MoPOP elevates rock, sci-fi, fantasy, and horror to velvet-rope status. Designed by Frank Gehry to look like a smashed guitar from above (check it out from the Space Needle), it appropriately houses a collection of Kurt Cobain's instruments — including his Mustang guitar from the Smells Like Teen Spirit video — in its Nirvana exhibition. Elsewhere, you'll find Deckard's *Blade Runner* gun, Luke Skywalker's lightsaber, Indiana Jones's fedora, Jack's axe from *The Shining*, a Terminator, some Aliens, and a six-fingered glove from *The Princess Bride*. Nerd nirvana. *mopop.org*

FREEWAY PARK: Opened in 1976, this masterpiece of brutalist architecture was the first park to be built over a motorway. Designed as a lid to cover the sunken Interstate 5, which bisects the city, its imposing mix of greenery, spiked by angular, concrete-block landscaping, creates the kind of picnic area in which you might imagine Big Brother watching over you.

FREMONT SCULPTURES: The quirky Fremont neighbourhood is fun to explore for its public sculptures. These include an 18ft stone troll that lives under the Aurora Bridge; a Lenin statue that was originally on display in communist Czechoslovakia; a Cold War rocket incongruously punctuating a shopping street; and Waiting for the Interurban, a life-sized sculpture of six people and a human-faced dog eternally awaiting public transport.

PIONEER SQUARE: Today's Seattle is built upon the remains of the original town, which burned to the ground in 1889, but visitors can still descend beneath the historic Pioneer Square neighbourhood (where the term Skid Row was coined) to see the shops and bars entombed under the city's streets. A great escape on rainy days. *undergroundtour.com*

GUM WALL: Seattle's most unsanitary attraction, the Gum Wall, began life (indeed, it must be teeming with bacteria) when theatre-goers started sticking used chewing gum on the wall while queueing for a show. Since then, the alleyway has become a local landmark, crammed with tourists admiring the vivid, Wonka-esque bubblegum fresco, as well as adding their own contributions.

THE GREAT OUTDOORS: Seattle is blessed with an exceptional setting, nestled between the Olympic and Cascade Mountains. Try kayaking between Puget Sound's islets, or hiking in Olympic National Park. Winter visitors will find ski slopes an hour's drive away at Snoqualmie Pass. This is the location of the 70-ft Snoqualmie Falls, which appear in the opening credits of David Lynch's '90s TV cult classic, *Twin Peaks*. There's a stand in the attraction's car park selling damn-fine coffee. *summitatsnoqualmie.com*

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Pike Place Market; Kimpton Palladian Hotel; Jupiter; Pike Place Market

Established in 1907, Pike Place Market was the city's original farmers' market. Overlooking the magnificent Elliott Bay, it's a Seattle icon, seen in countless travelogues and films, including Sleepless in Seattle

BUY

PIKE PLACE MARKET: The city's original farmers' market, established in 1907 and overlooking the magnificent Elliott Bay, is a Seattle icon, seen in countless travelogues and films, including *Sleepless in Seattle*. Its labyrinthine levels are crammed with farm shops, craft stalls, cafes, bakeries, restaurants, and — famously — fishmongers throwing their wares around. *pikeplacemarket.org*

NORDSTROM RACK: Department store Nordstrom has over 100 US branches. Next to the super-chic flagship store at 500 Pine Street is Rack. Here you'll find all the designer brands stocked by its neighbour, but at knock-down prices. Bring an empty suitcase. *nordstromrack.com*

AMAZON GO: At the retail giant's chain of grocery stores, the gimmick is that with its app installed you can simply grab shopping and go. Seattle has four locations, but the first is located in Amazon's impressive Day 1 building. *amazon.com*

LIKE A LOCAL

PINBALL PARADISE: Seattle's bars and venues are crammed with pinball tables. Shorty's, a rock dive with a carnival vibe, has around 20; slick, graffiti-covered bar Jupiter, a block away, has about 30. Seattle Pinball Museum, meanwhile, has over 50 free-to-play machines from the 1960s to the present day. *shortydog.com jupiterbarseattle.com seattlepinballmuseum.com*

CAFFEINE BUZZ: Tourists flock to the original branch of Starbucks, in Pike Place Market, but brand aficionados tend to be more impressed by The Seattle Roastery, Starbucks' flagship tasting room, opened in 2014. It's a wonderland of copper casks and coffee cocktails. *starbucksreserve.com*

CRUISE CONTROL: There are numerous cruises around Elliott Bay, offering stunning views of the historic waterfront and skyline. Alternatively, jump on a Washington State Ferries boat to Bainbridge Island for a spot of wine tasting at one of the seven wineries ($8.50 [£6.40] return). *wsdot.wa.gov/ferries*

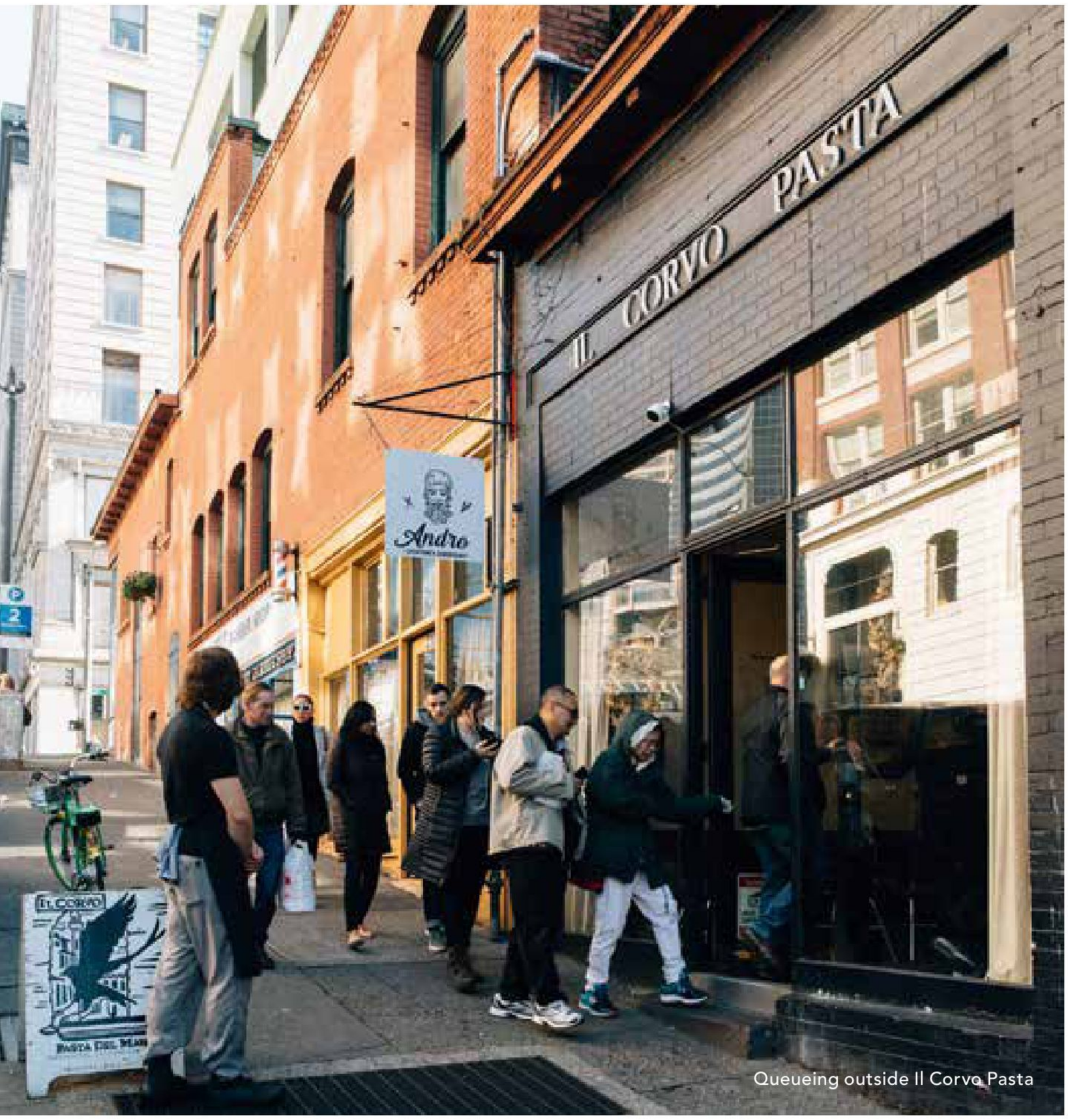
SLEEP

£ **HOTEL MAX:** Dedicated to music and art, this is the creative address to bed down in. A signed bass that belonged to Nirvana's Krist Novoselic hangs in the lobby, while rooms on the Sub Pop floor — where Charles Peterson's iconic grunge photography adorns the doors — feature bedside turntables. *hotelmaxseattle.com*

£££ **KIMPTON PALLADIAN HOTEL:** This boutique hotel, set in a landmark 1910 beaux arts building, stands out with its dark, masculine styling, complete with exposed brick, copper ceiling tiles and antique maps. Opposite the Moore Theatre, it's within walking distance of the Space Needle, Pike Place and the waterfront. *palladianhotel.com*

£££ **THE EDGEWATER HOTEL:** In 1964, when the Beatles were famously photographed fishing from their hotel room window, this is where they stayed. Perched on Elliott Bay, The Edgewater's interior has a hunting lodge vibe, complete with river-rock fireplaces and antler chandeliers. *edgewaterhotel.com*

SEATTLE



Queueing outside Il Corvo Pasta

EAT

£ BISCUIT BITCH: Bragging a 'trailer park to table' ethos, Biscuit Bitch's intentionally offhand staff serve traditional breakfast biscuits (a bewildering abuse of the humble scone, to us Brits), slathered in a variety of artery-clogging toppings, such as gravy, cheese, bacon, maple peanut butter, and spam. *biscuitbitch.com*

££ IL CORVO PASTA: Only open from 11am to 3pm, Monday to Friday, this diminutive Italian serves a small, daily-changing selection of freshly made artisan pasta, sauces, and focaccia. Queues are, unsurprisingly, lengthy, and you'll not have long to linger over your meal, but Seattleites don't seem to mind. *ilcorvopasta.com*

£££ JUNEBABY: This restaurant specialises in Southern soul food — a cuisine born of the slavery era that fuses West African, North American and European culinary traditions. Locally renowned chef Edouardo Jordan creates dishes with a reverence more commonly reserved for haute cuisine. *junebabyseattle.com*

AFTER HOURS

THE CROCODILE: Once co-owned by REM guitarist Peter Buck, the Croc was a cornerstone of Seattle's grunge scene — hosting the likes of Nirvana and Pearl Jam — until it closed in 2007. Reopened two years later, it continues to host live music, alongside karaoke nights, which are taken very seriously by Seattle's pop wannabes. *thecrocodile.com*

UNICORN: Decorated like a kaleidoscopic big top, this funfair-themed pub serves up a menu of carnival-based staples, including corn dogs and candy-flavoured cocktails, which you can knock back in the photo booth, or while playing skee-ball, a vintage arcade game. *unicornseattle.com*

NEUMOS: In its previous incarnation as Moe's, this was one of the grunge scene's legendary venues. After a six-year hiatus (and a rebranding, pronounced 'New Moe's'), it reopened in 2003 and quickly re-established its reputation. As well as hosting top indie acts, there's a regular '90s hip-hop night, which is more Fresh Prince than Public Enemy. *neumos.com*

ESSENTIALS

Getting there & around

From Heathrow, Virgin Atlantic flies daily; British Airways up to 11 time a week; Norwegian has four flights a week from Gatwick; and Thomas Cook Airlines has seven a week from Manchester. American Airlines flies daily from Heathrow via Chicago, JFK, Miami or Dallas.
virginatlantic.com ba.com
norwegian.com
thomascookairlines.com
americanairlines.co.uk
Average flight time: 10hrs.

The Seattle Center Monorail provides a quick link between downtown Seattle and the Seattle Center, home to the Space Needle, the Museum of Pop Culture, and The Children's Museum. The city is walkable, with plenty of public transport options. An all-day regional transit pass is available for visitors for $8 (£6). These are loaded onto regional transit cards that cost $5 (£3.80) and are available at all ORCA vending machines, for unlimited use on public transport.

When to go

To avoid the frequent drizzle, visit in summer, when temperatures average around 15-18C. Or, to avoid the crowds and peak-season prices, head there in spring or autumn, when the mercury hovers around a mild 10-12C.

More info

Lonely Planet Seattle. RRP: £14.99
seattle-washingtonstate.co.uk

How to do it

AMERICA AS YOU LIKE IT offers five nights in Seattle from £989 per person (based on two sharing), with return Virgin Atlantic flights from Heathrow and five nights at The Edgewater Hotel, room only.
americaasyoulikeit.com

ILLUSTRATION: JOHN PLUMER

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Velaa Private Island, covered with azure skies and adjacent to the pristine Indian Ocean, was developed to embody the very best of the Maldivian archipelago. The name of this private retreat, an elegant fusion of contemporary luxury with Maldivian culture, means “Turtle Island” in the local language – named after generations of sea turtles that have migrated here to nest and hatch.

Designed by Czech architect Petr Kolar, the overall design concept is contemporary, yet intimate, with Maldivian nuances.

Comprised of 43 private villas, houses and 4 four-bedroom residences, Velaa Private Island offers 18 villas stationed over the water.

Velaa Private Island boasts an extraordinary culinary experience with its outlets that are unrivaled throughout the Maldives. With three restaurants, two bars and a wine cellar, Velaa Private Island offers an extensive selection of outlets available for guests.

Working alongside the distinguished brand My Bland by Clarins, Velaa Private Island counts itself amongst only a handful of retreats throughout the world.

Other features which are uniquely Velaa are the largest wine cellar on Maldives, Golf Academy by Olazabal, the largest kid’s aqua park on Maldives, and a semi submarine. These make Velaa a realization of a dream to create a ‘beyond luxury’ ultra-exclusive hideaway.

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TRAVELLER 10

INDIAN OCEAN

IMAGE4CORNERS

In Traveller 10 this issue, we get adventurous in the Indian Ocean. The lesser-known corners of this idyllic region are where you'll find pristine jungle hikes, hands-on conservation experiences, grassroots tours, off-grid islands and low-key lodges, plus some of the world's best underwater wildlife. Words: Sarah Barrell, Emma Gregg, Pól Ó Conghaile, Adrian Phillips, Josephine Price & Heather Richardson

01
MAURITIUS: BEYOND THE BEACH

It's the moment I realise I probably shouldn't be doing this hike alone.

I'm looking up at the final vertical rock face I have to scale, a thin knotted rope as my only aid. Steep, forested slopes drop off on either side of the narrow ridge on which I'm standing. Since I left Otentic Mountain eco-camp about an hour ago, I haven't seen or heard a single other person, which — while admittedly not great if I fall — has been nothing short of heavenly.

Otentic Mountain isn't the sort of accommodation most people would associate with Mauritius — an island synonymous with polished, beach-side resorts. Set on a lush hillside overlooking the lesser-visited east coast, Otentic has four thatched, spacious tents perched on stilts with en suite bathrooms and glorious views out to the ocean. There's no phone signal or wi-fi here, water is sourced from the mountain stream that gurgles through the camp, meals are vegetarian, and it's fully solar-powered. I'm also thrilled to find seven two-month-old puppies tearing excitably around the place.

Heading out from Otentic that morning, camp manager Cedric had instructed me to follow the red dashes on the trees and rocks that mark the route to the top of Montagne Bambous, which rises 2,070ft behind the camp. There were other easier and shorter hikes, but I was after a challenge. "There's some exposure at the top," Cedric had said. "If you feel uncomfortable, just turn back."

Having passed the last tent, I follow a single dirt track as the morning humidity sets in, pushing past giant ferns and palm leaves, as plants in the undergrowth brush and scratch my legs. It's cooler under the canopy, sunlight dappling the spongy, leaf-littered ground. I hike to the top of the ridge, turn right and follow it upwards. Dead leaves crunch underfoot, gnarled trees glisten beneath a velvety moss. A slash of scarlet here and there reassures me I'm on the right path. I use the slim, coppery trunks of guava trees to haul myself up, negotiating boulders, low-slung branches and knotted roots, eating countless spider webs as I go.

When I come to the last sheer section, I'm almost at the top. Catching my breath, I look down and wonder if it's worth risking a slip. Throwing caution aside, I decide it is and clamber up, using tree roots as footholds.

Ducking through a thicket, I find myself in a clearing, a sudden gust of air chilling the layer of sweat that now covers me, along with patches of dirt, insect bites and scratches. I'm at the top of Montagne Bambous. The forested ridge along which I've just hiked stretches out to one side. Below me are fields of palm and sugar cane, and beyond, the Indian Ocean. This is a side of Mauritius I've not seen before: heady hikes, blissful solitude, abundant greenery and panoramic views. It's not what most people come here for — but for me, at least, it's a stronger draw than even the most polished beach-side resort. **HR**

PREVIOUS PAGES: Tsarabanjina Island, Madagascar
FROM LEFT: Hiking Montagne Bambous from Otentic Mountain; Chamarel Waterfall, Mauritius

Tents at Otentic Mountain cost from Rs6,000 (£133) a night, B&B, with some activities included. *otentic.mu*
Air Mauritius, British Airways, and TUI Airways fly direct from London to Mauritius from around £500 return. *airmauritius.com ba.com tui.co.uk*
Mauritius Conscious create eco-friendly, tailor-made packages. *mauritiusconscious.com*

IMAGES: AWL IMAGES; HEATHER RICHARDSON

02 MADAGASCAR: IN THE JUNGLE OF RARITIES

A clattering cough, like a flock of angry pheasants. Strident chirps followed by soft, nasal grunts. A screech like a horse, a wild boar and a teething baby rolled into one. I've been eager to see Masoala National Park's lemurs, but I had no idea that hearing them would be extraordinary, too.

The screech belongs to the white-belted black-and-white-ruffed lemur, a primate that looks magnificent when hurling itself through the rainforest canopy. The chirps and grunts are the call of the white-fronted brown lemur, which sports a cute balaclava of fluffy, white fur. The clattering cough, I discover, belongs to the red-ruffed lemur. It's a Masoala speciality, critically endangered and extremely rare.

"Jumping, jumping, jumping," yells Felix. When it comes to live nature commentary, sometimes simplest is best, and my local guide has just the right touch. Ask him a question and he offers information galore, but when something exciting is happening, he sticks to rapid whispers, urgent gestures and big, toothy smiles.

Right now, there's excitement all around us. A large group of red-ruffed lemurs — impressive creatures with teddy bear fur, dachshund-like faces and enormous black tails — are racing through the trees with extravagant leaps. Sounding the alarm, they disappear before we know it. It's enough to leave me breathless.

Covering most of a sizeable peninsula in northeastern Madagascar, Masoala contains around 900sq miles of rainforest, full of illusions and peculiarities. It can only be explored on foot, but it's so remote that few people ever do. Venturing along its narrow, dappled paths, I get a strong sense that in this jungle of rarities, I'm a rarity too.

The lemurs operate a shift system. The ones staring down at me now like Cheshire Cats will dissolve into the shadows at dusk, just as other species — invisible for now, ensconced in tree-trunk hollows and forks — start to appear, their eyes glowing like tiny lamps in our torch beams.

Many other creatures thrive among Masoala's pallisander trees, orchids and clumps of wild ginger. Tree frogs shine like tumbled stones on the leaves. Panther chameleons wobble precariously on twigs, and sometimes the dappled markings on the bark of a tree resolve into another oddity: a leaf-tailed gecko.

Felix, who is adept at spotting the seemingly impossible, can find these cryptic reptiles with ease. On an excursion to the island reserve of Nosy Mangabe, he discovers several; each time, my eyes struggle to see what he sees. Leaf-tailed geckos are prized by poachers, but their impeccable camouflage defeats all but the most determined. Equally elusive is the Peyrieras's pygmy chameleon — the colour of leaf litter and unbelievably tiny — but Felix promises to find me one and, to my astonishment, he succeeds.

My base for this wildlife adventure is Masoala Forest Lodge, a laid-back beach lodge with seven palm-thatched treehouses tucked amid the greenery. Scrupulously eco-friendly, it's built from sustainably harvested local materials, is largely solar-powered and the ovens are fuelled by deadwood. I divide my days between forest walks and kayaking forays along the coast on leafy creeks to spot parrots and kingfishers. Then, come nightfall, it's back into the forest to see what animals have emerged — the hairy-eared dwarf lemur, perhaps, or its cousin, the mouse lemur.

"When the day comes to an end, that's when really interesting things start happening," says Felix. Even aye-ayes — long-fingered lemurs that are normally very hard to see — are occasionally spotted near the lodge.

On our final evening, my companions and I feast on local fare, heaping raw papaya and rice onto ravenala palm leaves and eating the mixture with spoons fashioned from folded wild ginger fronds. And as the squeaks and whistles of mouse lemurs ring out from the forest, we add our own clinks to the chorus, toasting the good fortune that brought us to this precious place. **EG**

Between April and December, Natural World Safaris offers a nine-day tailor-made trip to Madagascar from £3,380 per person. The price includes six nights at Masoala Forest Lodge on a full-board basis, excluding international flights. *naturalworldsafaris.com*

IMAGES: ALAMY

FROM TOP: Masoala National Park; white-headed lemur

03
MALDIVES: TOP FIVE REASONS TO VENTURE UNDERWATER

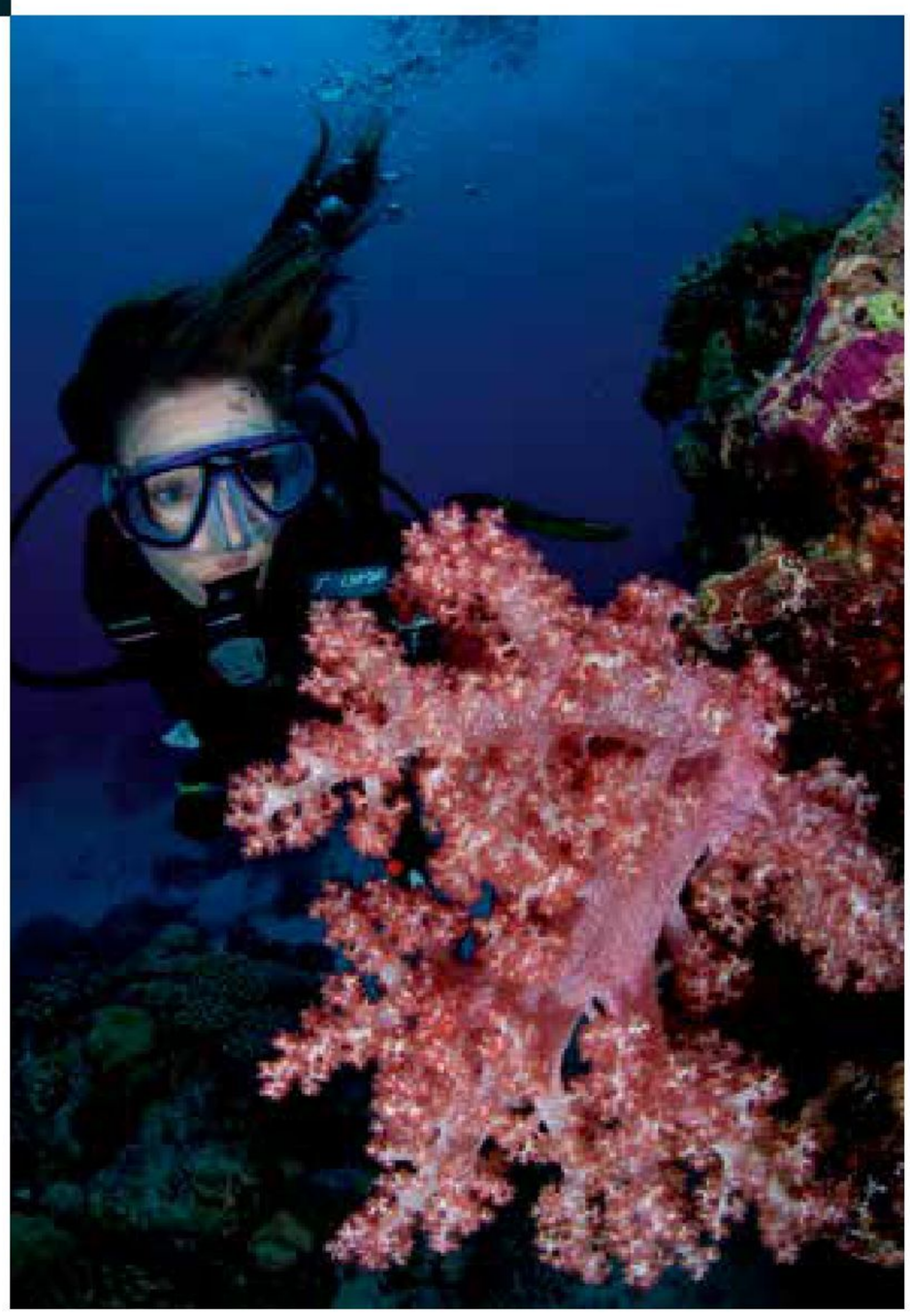
Swim with whale sharks
Maamigili Island, at the bottom of South Ari Atoll, offers the opportunity to see the world's largest fish year-round. Lots of resorts in the area offer snorkelling and diving trips to feeding sites, while experienced (and deep-pocketed) divers may prefer to join a liveaboard or head out on a private charter. Sightings peak between August and November. *diveworldwide.co.uk*

Eat, sleep and spa with the fishes
It's possible to head beneath the waves without getting wet. Book a treatment at Huvafen Fushi, the world's first underwater spa, and look out onto a colourful reef; or sleep with the fishes at The Muraka, a two-level villa at Conrad Maldives Rangali Island with its own undersea bedroom. Elsewhere, SEA at Anantara Kihavah Maldives Villas offers an underwater dining experience amid a coral garden. *huvafenfushi.com conradmaldives.com anantara.com*

Catch some rays at Hanifaru Bay
Between May and November, during the southwest monsoon, the reef at Hanifaru Bay Marine Protected Area acts like a funnel, filling up with plankton. This attracts hundreds of manta rays and whale sharks, which gather here to feed. Approved guides must accompany visitors and diving isn't allowed, just snorkelling.

Join a research team
Channel your inner Jacques Cousteau by joining hosts Dr Guy Stevens and his team of marine biologists on one of Four Seasons' Manta Trust Expeditions. On board luxury catamaran *Four Seasons Explorer* — essentially a floating PADI dive centre that also offers spa treatments and gourmet dining — you'll get to sail between atolls tracking manta rays. If you spot one the crew hasn't already logged, you'll get the chance to name it. Expeditions cater to up to 22 people and take place in September. *mantatrust.org fourseasons.com*

Dive Fotteyo Kandu
There are around 1,200 islands in the Maldives — enough dive sites for a lifetime (or three), but Fotteyo Kandu should near the top of your list. A narrow channel in Vavuu Atoll, it surprises with swim-throughs, overhangs and sea caves at depths of up to 130ft, (strong currents are possible, so this one is best for advanced divers only). You've got it all here, from soft, kaleidoscopic corals to groupers, reef sharks, eagle rays, triggerfish, and even the possibility of hammerheads. **POC**



FROM LEFT: Diving with manta rays; close-up view of a soft coral at Vaavu Atoll; Aldabra giant tortoise

IMAGES: GETTY; ALAMY; ROBERT HARDING

04 RODRIGUES: GIANT TORTOISE TRAILS

Africa's easternmost territory, Rodrigues, is a gem: thinly populated and dotted with sandy coves fringed by reefs, yet largely undiscovered by tourism. Part of Mauritius, the tiny island has an African flavour laced with European influences — English and French are spoken here, but the lingua franca is Creole.

Like the Seychelles, around 1,200 miles to the north west, Rodrigues is famous for its giant tortoises. In times past, they were architects of the landscape, dispersing seeds and keeping vegetation in check. Sadly, the two endemic species have been extinct for over two centuries, but 500 Aldabra giant tortoises were shipped in from the Seychelles in 2007, and they've since multiplied to around 2,000. At the Francois Leguat Giant Tortoise and Cave Reserve, visitors get the chance to wander among them. Offshore, at La Passe St François, the island's best dive site, you can swim with huge tuna, unicorn fish, groupers and jacks. *hayesandjarvis.co.uk* **EG**

Image: © Torsten Dickmann

The Seychelles Islands: another world...

Image: © Torsten Dickmann

Image: © Gerard Larose

Image: © Imran Ahmad

Seychelles Tourist Office - UK & Ireland
Ground Floor, 130-132 Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 9SA
Tel: +44 (0) 207 730 0700 seychelles@uksto.co.uk **www.seychelles.travel**

the seychelles islands
another world

05 ISLAND OF MOZAMBIQUE: PORTUGUESE ARCHITECTURE

A slender curve of coral lapped by jade and turquoise seas, the Island of Mozambique is a living heritage site that's fascinating to explore on foot. Populated by island communities, as well as Swahili and Arab spice, gold and slave traders, for centuries before being settled by the Portuguese around the turn of the 16th century, it remains, like many remote African outposts, wreathed in tradition and legends.

Today, most islanders live in Macuti town, a vibrant labyrinth of thatched houses and tin shacks in the south of the island. This is a lively *bairro* (neighbourhood), where women in traditional *capulanas* (sarongs) carry water on their heads, fishermen peddle their wares and boat-builders hammer at the timbers of dhows, splayed like whale skeletons on the shore.

The Portuguese settlers, however, preferred the island's northern reaches. They developed the area in a suitably grandiose style, founding Stone Town at the northeastern tip. The town's whitewashed, late-gothic Chapel of Nossa Senhora de Baluarte ('Our Lady of the Bulwark'), dates back to 1522 and still stands today; it's said to be the oldest European-style building in the Southern Hemisphere.

By the early 17th century, this place of worship had been overshadowed by the mighty Fort of São Sebastião, which protected the island from marauders and pirates. The fortress also included an intricate rainwater collection system to compensate for the scarcity of freshwater. It's the oldest intact fort still standing in sub-Saharan Africa — and, thanks to a UNESCO-driven restoration project over the past decade, once again provides public drinking water for the islanders.

The cobbled streets southwest of the fortress are dotted with colonial-era public buildings, including the hospital and the Palácio dos Capitães-Generais (Governors' Palace), which now houses the Museum of the Island of Mozambique. After the island was replaced as the capital of Portuguese East Africa by Lourenço Marques (present-day Maputo) in 1898, many homes fell into decay. A number, however, have since been restored, some as appealing guesthouses whose seafront patios offer a shelter from the salty breeze.

HOW TO DO IT: Mahlatini offers a nine-day trip to Mozambique, including seven nights at Coral Lodge — on the mainland, close to the Island of Mozambique — from £3,560 on a full-board basis, including flights from Heathrow to Nampula and overland transfers. *mahlatini.com* **EG**

IMAGE: ALAMY

ABOVE: Colonial buildings on the Island of Mozambique

RIGHT: Grand Comore island, Comoros

06
SRI LANKA: A WHALE OF A TIME

He removes his cap and bows his head towards the temple at the shoreline, praying to its goddess, just as all who set sail from the village of Trincomalee in northeastern Sri Lanka do. Then the engine guns and we're heading for open water. Daya takes up his position at the prow, rope in hand to steady himself as he rides the waves like a rodeo cowboy. He's a striking man, with glacier-blue eyes and a hard, whippet-thin body beneath his wetsuit. And I'm told he's the best at finding what we're after.

We speed away from land for nine miles, before the driver charts a course parallel to the coast. We're now floating above the watery canyon, which drops 3,000 feet from the bottom of our little boat; all the sightings in recent years have been along this vast, yawning corridor.

Daya scans the horizon meticulously, robotically, his head sweeping back and forth. We pass a lonely fishing boat, in which an old man in a wide-brimmed hat nods to the left and makes a signal with his hand, palm upwards, fingers opening quickly in imitation of an eruption. A lead. There's electricity in the salty air.

Then I — the newbie, with the untrained eye — spot it: a puff of spray in the distance. A short while later we're in position, engine off, bobbing and hoping. "It's all about respect," says Daya, looking at his watch. "You must sit quietly ahead of her; wait for her to come to you." So we wait. Five minutes. Eight minutes. I ready myself on the edge of the boat, chewing nervously on the mouthpiece of my snorkel. "That's 12 minutes. Any moment now. When I say, drop into the water as carefully as you c—"

And then the sea heaves 20 metres behind us, and a vast dorsal fin, gleaming like polished granite, breaks the surface with a mighty 'Pfuuusssshhh' from a pair of gigantic lungs. Mist lingers in the air as the animal starts to dive once more, its back rolling and rolling above the water. 'Go!' says Daya urgently, and I'm suddenly face-down in a mess of bubbles. The water quickly clears and there she is, looming below me like a submarine, a blue whale on her migration between the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. It's just her and me; I'm a speck hanging above this vast creature and a chasm in the ocean floor.

AP

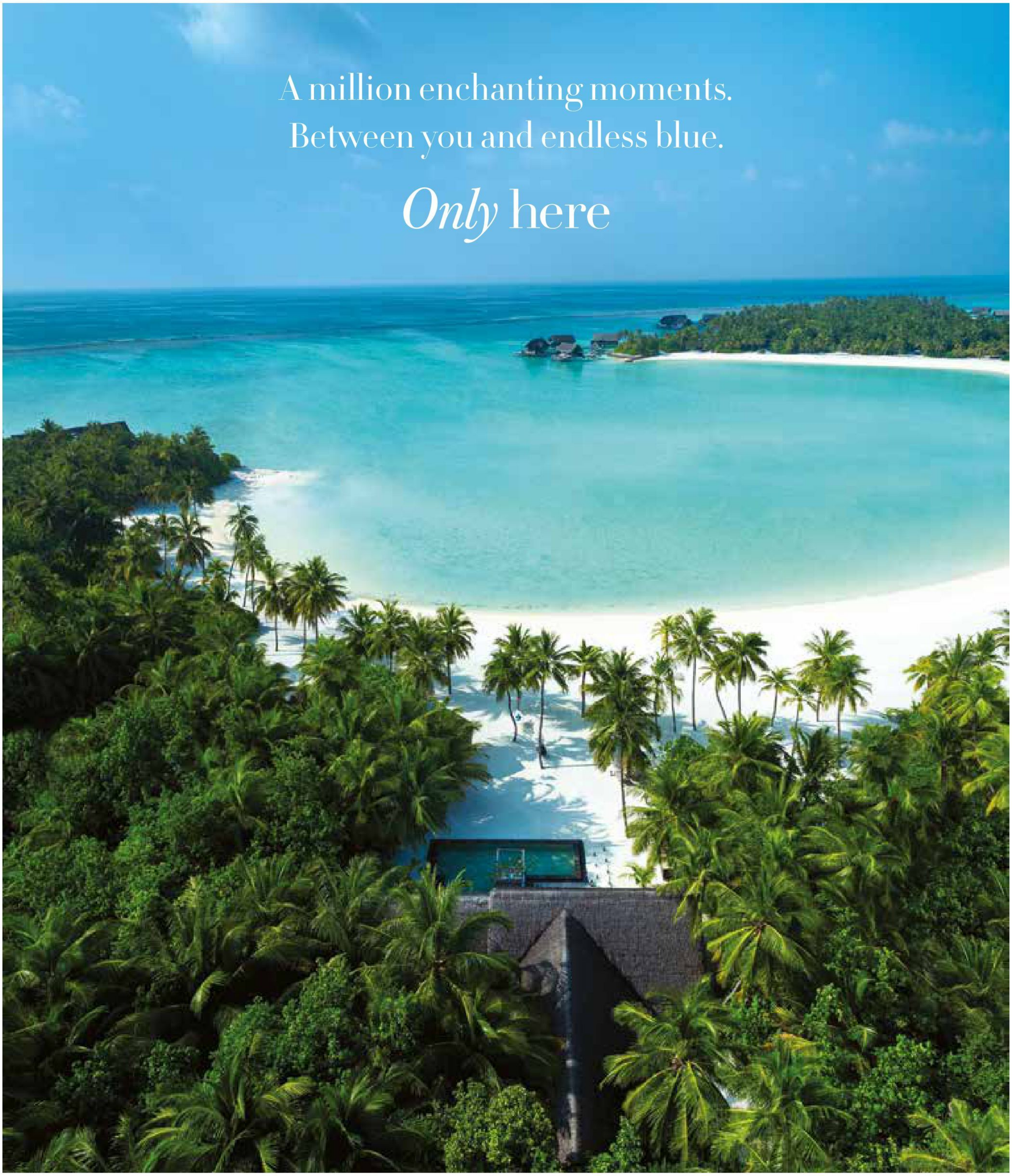
Nature Trails offers an eight-night wildlife and culture tour of Sri Lanka, including whale-watching at Trincomalee, from £2,700 per person. This includes all accommodation, guides, park fees and internal transport, but excludes international flights. SriLankan Airlines flies direct from London to Colombo, from £300 return.
cinnamonnaturetrails.com srilankan.com

07 COMOROS ARCHIPELAGO: THE LITTLE-KNOWN ISLANDS

So far off the beaten track it makes neighbouring Mozambique and Madagascar look positively mainstream, the Comoros archipelago is a collection of just four islands: Grande Comore, Mohéli and Anjouan, which comprise the nation of Comoros, and Mayotte, an overseas department of France. Persian and Yemeni merchants sourced spices and slaves on these specks of sand, coral and volcanic rock in the 15th and 16th centuries, and Swahili culture prospered; in the 19th century, France colonised the islands. The archipelago is home to wild lemurs (on Mohéli and Anjouan) and a reclusive colony of dugongs (on Mayotte). It's a low-key destination for hikers and beach-hoppers, too; head out on a diving or snorkelling trip and, with luck, you'll see turtles or even glimpse humpback whales. History buffs should visit Moroni on Grande Comore, where grand, weather-worn mansions and the Grand Mosque du Vendredi showcase the islands' rich history.

HOW TO DO IT: *undiscovered-destinations.com* **EG**

IMAGE: GETTY



One&Only

REETHI RAH

Maldives

oneandonlyreethirah.com

08 | PEMBA, TANZANIA: DIVING & SNORKELLING

With a name that's synonymous with spices and mystique, Zanzibar is a beguiling destination. Few may realise, however, that this is an archipelago rather than a single island. Instead of staying on Unguja, the largest island, choose its quieter northern neighbour, Pemba. Thanks to long-running marine conservation programmes designed to protect its coral, this is one of East Africa's best diving and snorkelling spots. Migrating humpback whales cruise the Pemba Channel in the summer, whale sharks are regular visitors in January and February and the newly classified (and endangered) Indian Ocean humpback dolphin feeds offshore.

Home to just a handful of guesthouses and resorts, Pemba's rural landscapes were largely unknown to tourists until relatively recently. The Manta Resort began to change all that, however, in 2013 when, amid a flurry of publicity, it launched the Underwater Room in a pristine lagoon just off the island's northwestern tip. Those with US$1,700 (£1,149) per night to spare can be kings or queens of the waves by making this exclusive retreat their own. The name is a slight misnomer, though: the Underwater Room is essentially a stationary houseboat, with large windows in the hull — but let's not spoil the romance. It has three levels: a shaded and open-sided living area just above the water's surface, an open deck on top and, down below, a sleeping cube, accessed via a four-metre ladder.

Six years on from its launch, the Underwater Room has nicely bedded in with its surroundings; coral is growing on the anchor lines and fish have even started using the structure as a shelter from predators. After dark, underwater spotlights illuminate nocturnal marine life, letting you watch their activities undetected.

HOW TO DO IT: Expert Africa offers a holiday on Pemba with eight nights at The Manta Resort from £1,838, full board, excluding international flights. Nights in the Underwater Room cost extra. Additional days on Unjuga (Zanzibar) or on safari in Tanzania, Kenya or elsewhere can be arranged on request. *expertafrica.com* **EG**

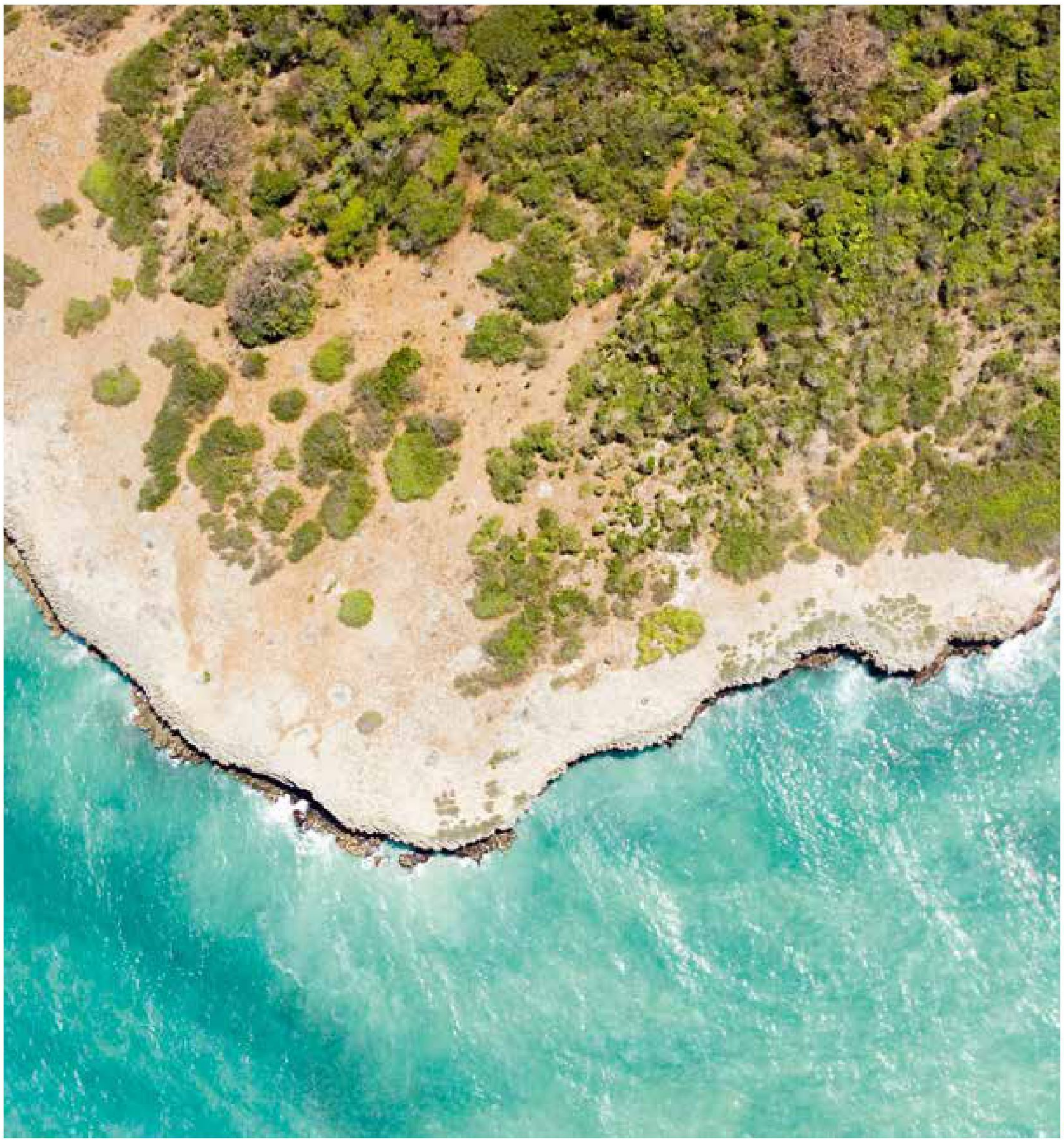


IMAGE: GETTY

RIGHT: The northern tip of Pemba, Zanzibar

THE SEYCHELLES
Paradise found

Sweeping white sand beaches and calm cerulean seas — a stay at Kempinski Seychelles Resort is an indulgent escape close to nature

The Seychelles, with its abundant marine life, including graceful turtles, is the perfect place to dive; wander through a jungle blanketed by coconut groves; or gaze into the knowing eye of a 200-year-old giant tortoise.

The archipelago of 115 islands, many of which are uninhabited, is also nicknamed the Galápagos of the Indian Ocean due to its array of rare and endangered plants, lizards and birds, such as the fruit pigeon and the national bird of the Seychelles, the black parrot.

While some of the smaller islands are home to only one private resort, the main island, Mahé, has a wide choice of retreats, with a handful of truly outstanding properties.

Located on the exclusive south end of Mahé in Baie Lazare, Kempinski Seychelles Resort is an idyllic base from which to explore the island.

Set in dazzling surroundings of untouched, natural beauty, this beachfront paradise is located opposite an offshore reef and has a swimming pool as well as multiple restaurants, ranging from beachside casual to fine dining.

Barefoot luxury is an overriding priority at the resort, with stylish rooms and suites blending harmoniously with nature, just steps from a sweeping 800-metre stretch of secluded beach. Every evening, guests can wiggle their toes in the sand and watch the magical sight of the sun sinking into the Indian Ocean.

RELAX AND INDULGE

CALM THE MIND
Switch off with a sensory ritual in Kempinski's spa or strike a pose on a hilltop during a yoga class.

BE ROMANTIC
Connect with a loved one over an intimate candlelit dinner on the beach or a private picnic in the wild.

EXPLORE NATURE

Half the islands that make up the Seychelles are protected national parks and reserves. Guests can immerse themselves in nature here, snorkelling or diving on the offshore tropical reef, or surfing and kayaking above the waves.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE
Getting to the Seychelles has never been easier. British Airways now offers a 10-hour direct flight, while a transfer to Kempinski Seychelles Resort in Baie Lazare only takes half an hour. To book your escape to paradise, simply visit: *kempinski.com/seychelles*

Kempinski
Seychelles Resort
BAIE LAZARE

To find out more, visit *kempinski.com/seychelles* or call *+248 438 6666*

09 LA DIGUE, SEYCHELLES: OFF-GRID INDIAN OCEAN

This wild, rugged 115-island archipelago, 900 miles off the coast of mainland East Africa, is home to the world's only oceanic granite islands. The Seychelles might be less polished than the Maldives, but it has no lack of pristine white sand. If you want a truly cast-away vibe — without the exorbitant price tag attached to the outer coral islands that double as private resorts — then La Digue is the destination. High-end hotels are few to none, but family-run guesthouses thrive on this carefree and largely car-free island, where the main traffic hazard might be a giant tortoise snoozing on the tarmac. The tourist office — a modest wooden villa with a thatched roof — is the main town's biggest building, issuing room bookings, bike hire and photocopied hand-drawn maps of the few sealed roads that run beyond the harbour's fringes.

Thanks to its teardrop shape and impossibly pink granite boulders framing soft, white, palm-fringed crescents, La Digue is prime day-tripping terrain for selfie-snapping honeymooners. But once the crowds retreat to the newlywed suites of Praslin and Mahé islands, La Digue rewards travellers with burnt orange sunsets that transform the almost uninterrupted halo of beaches from white to gold, and the water to mercury. There's little to do here, after dark. And dark it is, as streetlights are scarce and most of the island's few low-rise buildings are powered by generators. It's a boon for stargazing but a nuisance if you're piloting a bike; most locals ride one-handed, using their smartphone in lieu of a bicycle light. Have a cup of *calu* (palm wine) and go with the wobbly flow.

Come morning, before the ferries dock, follow sandy trails out to the east coast's no-name beaches, stopping to buy fish fritters and fruity, tomato-based octopus curries from roadside shacks, whose owners occupy themselves, between scant customers, shooing roosters off the tables. Then, kick back to listen to the cicadas and the pull of surf on sand, with those sleepy giant tortoises as your only company.

HOW TO DO IT: Cabane des Anges has double-room apartments from £100 a night, on a B&B basis. British Airways flies direct from the UK to Mahé. There are regular air and sea connections between the island of Mahé and Praslin; La Digue is a 15-minute ferry-ride away from the island of Praslin.

seychelles.travel cabanesdesanges.sc ba.com **SB**

IMAGE: GETTY

RIGHT: Anse Source d'Argent beach, La Digue

10 ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS: GRASSROOTS TOURS

"There!" he yelps. My eyes dart, but the water is still.

"Quick, there," he screeches, and again my eyes follow his. In the distance, a fish shoots out of the water. The crescent of the splash is reflected in the smile that ignites Qutub's face, his cheeks soaring up to meet his ears. "Yeehaa," he squeals, punching the air. It's the second bluefin trevally we've seen today.

I'd met Qutub, a fisherman from Bangalore, on a jetty in Havelock Island. We've headed out on the fishing boat he built himself, into a vast expanse of blue. If we carry on going straight for several hundred miles, we'd hit Myanmar but, instead, we veer west towards Middle Andaman Island, accompanied by more cackles and fist pumps as Qutub spots schools of groupers. Originally from the Indian mainland, Qutub came here for fishing opportunities in 1996 and his energy for the endeavour hasn't dimmed a notch.

There's a frenetic energy beneath the water — and one above, too, as we tentatively wait for another bluefin trevally to pierce through that cerulean ceiling. All around us, the water teems with wildlife. "Fishing here is very visual," Qutub tells me. The sea may be a hive of activity, but my eye is drawn to land. We've sailed past island after island of pristine rainforest and beaches; this is not what island tourism usually feels like.

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands have all the scenery of the Maldives and the Seychelles, the rugged verdant interior of Mauritius and the archipelago vibe of the Greek islands — but with none of the crowds of any of them. Divers gather around the beach shacks lining Havelock Bay, but that's where the bustle ends. There are plenty of places to drift off to. Almost 600 islands make up this speckled land in the Bay of Bengal. They are geographically closer to Thailand and Myanmar, but remain under India's auspice and time zone. And here, they put conservation first. The islands are — so people repeatedly tell me — "India's baby". Everyone, according to Qutub, is keeping an eye on how tourism develops here.

With the rise of visitors came the enforcement of laws. There's a desire to not let tourism dent traditions and change the islands' environmental integrity. Expect, in return, a wave of bureaucracy as a guest, from having to fly via mainland India to the permits that only allow access to certain islands. Then there are the inter-island ferries that must be pre-booked and run to the vaguest of schedules.

You aren't just passing through when you visit the Andamans. And I'm OK with that; I'm more than happy to dawdle, box-tick, hoop-jump, and form-fill if it means helping these islands remain pristine.

As we glide through the strait between Peel and Nicholson islands, I admire the centuries-old forests, conserved by India's strict logging laws. But out here on the water, things are happening. Qutub points out a spattering of light ahead. There's something shimmering below the surface. "That way," he beams, and we're off again.

HOW TO DO IT: A double room at Jalakara, a boutique hotel in Havelock's rainforest interior, costs from £155 per night. *jalakara.info*

BOAT TRIPS: *andamansportsfishing.com* **JP**

RIGHT: Fishermen off Havelock Island

IMAGE: ALAMY

THE RESIDENCE
MALDIVES
Dhigurah

by *Cenizaro*®

REVIVE YOUR *SENSES*

Come alive in your new island home, where white sandy beaches meet pristine blue waters. Wake up to breathtaking views of the Indian Ocean and dive into new adventures each day. At sunset, unwind and dine to a new rhythm with lush sounds at Café del Sol. Here, at the newly unveiled The Residence Maldives at Dhigurah – every day is a fresh new beat.

MOMENTS ENRICHED.

TRAVEL WRITING COMPETITION 2019

DO YOU WANT TO SEE YOUR NAME IN PRINT?

If you dream of being a travel writer, you'll want to enter our annual Travel Writing Competition. It's a chance to see your work published in *National Geographic Traveller* (UK) and to go on an African adventure of a lifetime

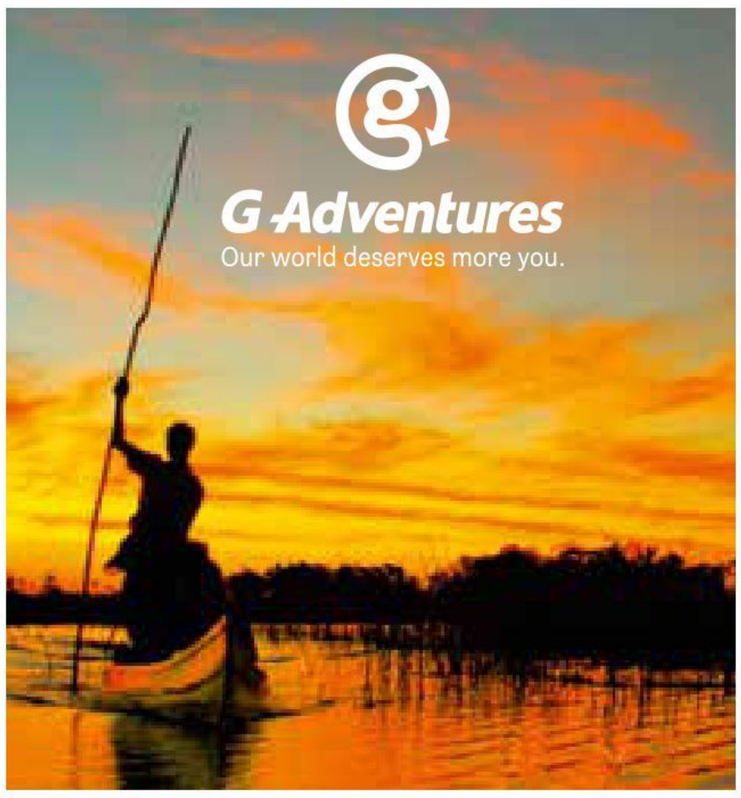
If you find yourself jotting down your thoughts and observations on your travels, then listen up. Our annual Travel Writing Competition is open for entries once again, offering budding travel writers the chance to see their name in print in one of the UK's most prestigious magazines.

All we want is 500 words on a travel experience you've found inspiring. It could be anything from whale-watching in Alaska to a luxury weekend on the Amalfi Coast.

Your entry needs to capture the essence of *National Geographic Traveller* (UK): a strong sense of place, immersive experiences and authentic storytelling with flair and finesse. So, what are you waiting for?

THE PRIZE

Courtesy of G Adventures, the winner will embark on an epic, eight-night trip across Southern Africa. This classic itinerary showcases some of the best the continent has to offer. You'll journey from Namibia, across Botswana and on to Zimbabwe on an authentic African adventure that takes in the elephants of Chobe National Park, San Bushmen in the Kalahari; the thundering roar of Victoria Falls; and the Okavango Delta, explored by dugout *mokoro* canoe. A knowledgeable chief experience officer will ensure your accommodation provides the most authentic experience possible, including camping beneath starry skies for a night you'll never forget. *gadventures.co.uk*



Entries close on 8 July 2019. Terms and conditions apply.
Enter online at ***nationalgeographic.co.uk/competitions***

TRAVEL GEEKS

ASK THE EXPERTS

NEED ADVICE FOR YOUR NEXT TRIP? ARE YOU AFTER RECOMMENDATIONS, TIPS AND GUIDANCE? THE TRAVEL GEEKS HAVE THE ANSWERS...

Q // I'm looking to book a trip to Iceland this winter to learn how to photograph the Northern Lights. Any recommendations on which company to go with?

Most first-time visitors flock to the south and west of Iceland in winter, and for good reason. With captivating landscapes and Reykjavik, the capital, within easy reach of the main airport, it kind of makes sense. But for photographing the aurora borealis, you need darkness, so it's best to head as far from the brightly lit towns as possible. You've more chance of seeing the lights in remote places, although sightings are never guaranteed.

Wild Photography Holidays hosts three Northern Lights-focused tours in Iceland with tuition. Its week-long North Iceland itinerary, for example, takes in some of the snowy landscapes featured in *Game of Thrones*.

Meanwhile, Tatra Photography offers long weekend trips that head east to Jökulsárlón, the famous volcanic black beach and glacial lagoon that's so impressive when lit green by the dancing lights. With huge ice floes making their way onto the nearby beach, it's an iconic spot for daytime photography too. The company runs a similarly short trip to the west coast at Kirkjufell.

Going further north, Lapland or the Arctic Circle are an even safer bet for seeing the Northern Lights. Specialist aurora chaser Aurora Addicts operates out of its base in one of the most sparsely populated spots in Arctic Norway. With very small groups and two photography guides, you'll need to book early. The Aurora Zone is another UK company with a number of aurora-related trips, on some of which, you can borrow a camera and tripod for a night.

wildphotographyholidays.com tatraphotographyworkshop.com aurora-addicts.com theaurorazone.com

NORI JEMIL

IMAGES: AWL IMAGES; GETTY

Q // I love the sound of Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way, but 1,600 miles sounds like a long drive. Should I do it all or is there a smarter way?

I grew up in County Galway, less than an hour from Ireland's west coast, and I've spent a lifetime returning to explore its nooks and crannies. I've seen most of it now, but I've also come to a realisation: 'seeing' isn't enough in Ireland. Yes, you can 'do' the Wild Atlantic Way — driving the 1,600 miles from northern Donegal to West Cork — in as little as a week. But you'll have a far richer trip if you do less.

There are lots of reasons for this. Some are practical — once you leave Ireland's national (N) roads and venture onto the thatch of thinner, twistier regional (R) and local (L) roads, driving gets a lot more, ahem, interesting. Others are about unscheduled stops. You might pass a view that makes you want to get the camera out — a little gallery in the middle of nowhere, perhaps, or a pub with a sign for fresh seafood. You could get chatting to a local who tells you about a traditional music session in town that night, or a weekend festival. You might hear of a farmer selling ice cream further along the peninsula, a surf lesson on the beach, or a boatman who's spotted dolphins in the bay.

You need the broad outline of a plan, of course — a few nights of pre-booked accommodation, a car rental pick-up and return point. You'll need to choose a section of the touring route — Donegal or Connemara, for example, or the off-radar stretch from Sligo across North Mayo to the desolate Mullet Peninsula. Beyond that, however, it's all about opening yourself up to adventures that crop up along the way. Once you break with that A-to-B compulsion, the magic starts to happen. *wildatlanticway.com*

PÓL Ó CONGHAILE

Q // I always find hiring child car seats such an ordeal. What's the best way to do it?

One of the major hassles of flying with young children is organising booster seats in a rental car. You can bring your own, if you're sure it complies with the rules in your destination — most airlines will let you take one on-board without charge. But car seats are often bulky. Taking a Bubblebum inflatable seat (OK for the EU and US) might offer a happy medium here.

The alternative is to rent a seat from the hire car company. It's a service that all the big players offer, but often at a substantial cost. For a rental in Majorca with Avis, for example, it'll cost £11.81 per day.

But the real problem can come with fitting the seat. Insurance and liability reasons can lead to a lack of assistance from staff at some rental car outlets. You also don't know which seat you'll be getting. One solution is to phone the branch you'll be picking up from, and ask which model they usually use. Go online, find the manual for that model, and save it on your phone, just in case. *bubblebum.co*

DAVID WHITLEY

Q I've heard a lot about forest bathing recently. What are the benefits and where can I do it?

The Japanese art of *shinrin yoku*, or forest bathing, is becoming increasingly popular among people wanting a deeper connection with nature. Reported benefits include reducing stress, lowering blood pressure and increasing a sense of wellbeing.

The idea is pretty simple: leave your electronic devices at home, head to a forest and allow yourself to wander with no clear path, using your senses to guide you by listening to birds around you and noting how the leaves and trees surrounding make you feel. The National Trust website has a great list of places for forest bathing in the UK. You could even turn it into a weekend retreat in the great outdoors. Last year, UK holiday park operator Away Resorts launched The Zen, a place to retreat to away from digital noise. The pared-back holiday home in Sandy Balls, in the New Forest, comes with a hot tub under the trees and soothing neutral decor.

Meanwhile, Forest Holidays offers three-hour Forest Bathing Experiences in Blackwood Forest, Hampshire, complete with an attendant forest therapy guide.
nationaltrust.org.uk
awayresorts.co.uk
forestholidays.co.uk

TAMSIN WRESSELL

THE EXPERTS

PÓL Ó CONGHAILE // CONTRIBUTING WRITER

NORI JEMIL // CONTRIBUTING WRITER AND PHOTOGRAPHER

DAVID WHITLEY // CONTRIBUTING WRITER

TAMSIN WRESSELL // ASSISTANT EDITOR, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELLER (UK)

THE INFO

BRITISH AIRWAYS AT 100

ON 25 AUGUST, BRITISH AIRWAYS WILL REACH THE GRAND OLD AGE OF 100. WE LOOK BACK AT ITS CENTURY IN THE SKIES

IN 2019, SCOTTISH CRAFT BREWERY BREWDOG PRODUCES THE FIRST BEER BREWED AT 40,000FT IN A BRITISH AIRWAYS BOEING 787

1919

British Airways' forerunner company, **AIRCRAFT TRANSPORT AND TRAVEL** (AT&T), launches the world's first daily international scheduled air service, between **LONDON** and **PARIS**

1924

DAIMLER AIRWAYS (a successor to AT&T) merges with Britain's three other main fledgling airlines to form **IMPERIAL AIRWAYS LIMITED**

1935

A NUMBER OF SMALL UK AIR TRANSPORT COMPANIES MERGE TO FORM THE ORIGINAL PRIVATELY-OWNED **BRITISH AIRWAYS LIMITED**

1939

British Airways Limited merges with Imperial Airways to form the nationalised British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC)

1952

The **DE HAVILLAND COMET**, the world's first commercial jet airliner, makes its maiden scheduled flight

1974

BOAC and **BRITISH EUROPEAN AIRWAYS** (BEA) were the two principal British operators of scheduled international passenger and cargo services from the 1940s-60s. They merge to form **BRITISH AIRWAYS**

1997

A new corporate identity is unveiled in June 1997 on aircraft designs with a new fleet of aircraft for short-haul services. In 1999, oneworld is formed to include British Airways, Qantas and American Airlines

2017

BRITISH AIRWAYS **STOPS OFFERING FREE FOOD AND DRINK** FOR ECONOMY CABIN PASSENGERS ON SHORT-HAUL FLIGHTS

THE NUMBER OF CUPS OF TEA SERVED TO BRITISH AIRWAYS' 45 MILLION ANNUAL PASSENGERS

2018

Anounces £6.5bn investment in aircraft, lounges and cabins

SOURCE: BRITISHAIRWAYS.COM

IN NUMBERS *British Airways*

27

years the supersonic Concorde service ran, at altitudes of up to 60,000ft. The final flight, from New York to London, was on 24 October 2003.

90

seconds, on average, separating every British Airways aircraft taking off somewhere in the world. It has a fleet of over 280 planes.

200

The number of destinations that British Airways flies to, in 75 countries worldwide, across six continents.

HOT TOPIC

THE HIDDEN COST OF CAR HIRE

AFTER A CLAMP DOWN ON EUROPE'S BIG FIVE RENTAL COMPANIES, WE EXAMINE WHETHER CAR HIRE REALLY HAS BECOME MORE TRANSPARENT

WORDS: JAMES DRAVEN

We've all been there: standing in a car park, exhausted after a long flight, meticulously combing a vehicle's bodywork for the tiniest scrape, fearful that when we return our rental car, we might be charged an exorbitant amount to repair some unnoticed, preexisting scratch. In fact, a study by *Which? Travel* found that 63% of British travellers worry about being stung by car rental firms' extra charges.

Not without good cause, it seems. In 2015, five of Europe's biggest car hire companies — Avis Budget, Enterprise, Europcar, Hertz, and Sixt — made a series of commitments to the UK government's Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), the European Commission, and other consumer enforcement authorities across Europe to be clearer about key information and charges, so consumers know how much they are paying, up front.

In March this year, the CMA found businesses were failing to offer consumers such transparent pricing information. "The big five told us in 2015 they'd update their practices, but we've found they weren't doing all that they'd committed to," said a statement from George Lusty, senior director for consumer protection at the CMA. "Following our further intervention, the charges people see on the big five's websites will be clear, prominent and accurate, allowing customers to choose the best possible deal. We'll keep the firms under close review to ensure they deliver on their commitments."

It sounds like good news for consumers, but there are still more pitfalls to be wary of, even for savvy travellers. "I work on car hire stories all the time," says Rory Boland, editor of *Which? Travel*, "And I still get nervous approaching the car hire desk! It's an industry plagued by unscrupulous practices. It's not uncommon for customers to be charged for repairs that are never made and for damage they may never have caused, often only finding out they've been billed when the car hire company charges their credit card."

The CMA has recently taken separate action against two Spanish car hire companies — Centauro Rent a Car, and Record Go Alquiler Vacacional — following reports that British tourists were being misled by their practices. It's worth noting that most of the complaints *Which?* receives related to car hire are based in Spain. Meanwhile, anecdotal evidence suggests French companies are known for charging fees for cleaning returned cars; out-of-hours drop-off charges are common in Italy; and some unscrupulous US companies trick customers by offering 'free' upgrades to larger vehicles — and then charging for them.

One particular headache at the rental office is the dreaded 'super collision damage waiver' (SCDW). These hard-sold policies, which can cost around £15-£30 daily, are often pushed to customers as the only alternative to paying up to £2,000 excess in the case of vehicle damage or theft. However, it's best to use specialist insurers offering annual, standalone car hire excess policies, which offer better levels of cover than SCDWs for as little as £40 for a whole year.

One of the best pieces of advice is simply to book well in advance. If you map out your trips beforehand, you can avoid unnecessary tolls and tell shady car hire companies to hit the road.

AVOID PAYING EXTRAS

DON'T PAY FOR CAR HIRE DAMAGE YOU DIDN'T CAUSE

"Pick up and drop off the hire car in the daytime and record any damage by taking pictures. Insist staff indicate any damage you find when picking up and agree no damage has been caused when dropping off," suggests Rory Boland.

DON'T TAKE THE 'FULL-EMPTY' FUEL OPTION

"The fuel provided is at a premium price and you won't want to risk running out of petrol while returning the car, so you'll always be gifting the firm at least some free fuel," says Rory.

DO USE A CAR HIRE BROKER

"The ways car hire companies try to get you to pay for more than the headline price are too numerous to list," advises Rory. "Use a car hire broker — the best ones have an all-inclusive approach, including all the necessary insurance — and if something does go wrong, they'll help you claim against the car hire company." *Which?* recommends Zest Car Rental: *zestcarrental.com*

AND ANOTHER THING... TOURISM FOR TOMORROW AWARDS 2019

SOCIAL IMPACT AWARD
Non-profit Awamaki, which connects Andean workers to a global market, won for the economic opportunities it provides Peruvian women

DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP AWARD
Advisory board St Kitts Sustainable Destination Council won for its 'pro-planet, pro-people' tourism plan

CLIMATE ACTION AWARD
The adults-only Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort in Aruba picked up the award as the Caribbean's only certified carbon neutral resort

INVESTING IN PEOPLE AWARD
Lemon Tree Hotels in India won for its socially inclusive work environment, employing people of different abilities and ethnicities

CHANGEMAKERS AWARD
SEE Turtles in the USA was recognised for its efforts in protecting sea turtles. It's saved 1.7 million hatchlings and educated around 10 million people

IMAGE: GETTY

Kit list

TREKKING IN THE TROPICS

IF YOU'RE PLANNING A TRIP TO TROPICAL CLIMES, YOU'LL NEED LIGHTWEIGHT, BREATHABLE AND QUICK-DRYING GEAR THAT PROTECTS AGAINST INSECT BITES AND THE SUN'S RAYS. HERE'S OUR PICK OF THE BEST. WORDS: TAMSIN WRESSELL

1 JACK WOLFSKIN DESERT ROLL-UP PANTS
These trousers are made from nylon — a light, stretchy fabric that allows for easy movement yet still feels comfortable. They're fast drying with quick moisture control, and UPF 40+ protects you from the sun. RRP: £60. *jack-wolfskin.co.uk*

3 FJÄLLRÄVEN ABISKO COOL T-SHIRT
Fjällräven's Abisko collection is designed for low weight trekking. This T-shirt, made from a combination of recycled polyester and organic cotton to wick away moisture, is perfect for more humid climates. RRP: £45. *fjallraven.co.uk*

2 MERRELL MQM FLEX GTX BOOTS
Made with athletes in mind, these boots combine technology and traction so they're breathable and lightweight. A Gore-Tex waterproof membrane and air-cushioned heels mean they're ideal for all the terrain and conditions of tropical trekking. RRP: £125. *cotswoldoutdoor.com*

4 GRAYL ULTRALIGHT WATER PURIFIER
Lightweight but heavy-duty, this water purifier lets you drink from almost any freshwater source, filtering out pathogens, chemicals and heavy metals. Indispensable on proper treks. RRP: £45. *grayl.com*

5 CASIO PROTREK SMARTWATCH WSD-F30
Full-colour offline maps and compatibility with apps like ViewRanger make this ideal for exploring remote places. It's also water resistant and has a long-life battery. RRP: £450. *snowandrock.com*

6 INCOGNITO SUNCREAM & INSECT REPELLENT
This three-in-one insect repellent, sunscreen and moisturiser is a natural — and powerful — alternative to DEET. It's also safe to use for anyone aged three months and above. RRP: £22.99. *lessmosquito.com*

Three more to try

MOUNTAIN WAREHOUSE CLIP TRAVEL TOWEL
Super absorbent and quick drying.
RRP: £7.99.
mountainwarehouse.com

LIFESYSTEMS BITE & STING RELIEF
Roll-on applicator to soothe insect and plant stings.
RRP: £4.49.
lifesystems.co.uk

QUECHUA HIGH-TOP MOUNTAIN WALKING SOCKS
Designed to reduce chafing and manage moisture.
RRP: £14.99.
decathlon.co.uk

Tech traveller

TECHNOLOGY REPORTER FOR @BBCCLICK AND AUTHOR OF *WORKING THE CLOUD* KATE RUSSELL PICKS THE LATEST INNOVATIONS

PERFECT PLANNING

IF YOU WANT TO EXPLORE THE WORLD BUT THINK PLANNING A MULTI-CITY TRIP IS TOO MUCH EFFORT, THINK AGAIN

There are myriad tools to help you plan your journey in just a few clicks, many of which link directly to some of the most trusted discount travel sites on the web. EightyDays.me is one such site, offering an all-in-one trip planner. It lets you choose your starting city, then select the regions or types of destinations you want to visit ('must-see romantic cities', for instance). You'll be given a suggested route with up to six stops; if you're not keen on the suggestions, simply hit shuffle for a new itinerary in an instant. Your chosen flights can then be found through Kiwi.com or Skyscanner, and accommodation arranged through Airbnb or Booking.com.

Destigogo is another service that suggests a destination from parameters you set, including location, budget and experience.

For in-depth destination research, meanwhile, try the video-based trip-planning platform SeeVoov. Its system trawls the web collecting information posted by other travellers, offering insight into activities and attractions in your chosen locations.

And if you're travelling through different time zones, try the beautifully designed Circa[3] on iOS (£3.99). The app displays the time in multiple locations, making it far easier to communicate with friends and family in different countries.

St Mark's Square, Venice

TOP APPS FOR... *flawless photographs*

SNAPSEED

IOS/ANDROID (FREE)

This has a full array of top-notch editing tools, including selective brushes and a decent collection of film-related filters. *snapseed.online*

VSCO

IOS/ANDROID (FREE, OR $19.99 [£15.27] A YEAR FOR FULL MEMBERSHIP)

VSCO offers a huge collection of vintage-style filters, a few of which are free to use, or all are available with a full membership. *vsco.co*

AFTERLIGHT 2

IOS £2.99

Create unique edits with Afterlight 2's mood-enhancing filters and overlays. *afterlight.co*

TOUCHRETOUCH

IOS/ANDROID £1.99

This app removes unwanted objects and blemishes from your pictures, rebuilding the background from the surrounding pixels. *adva-soft.com*

GET THE GADGET

Vago portable luggage compressor

We could all use a bit more room in our suitcase. This tiny but powerful vacuum luggage compressor is my new favourite travel companion. It works by sucking all the air out of the accompanying sealable bag, crushing clothes down so that they take up as much as 50% less space in your case. The pressure-detecting sensor means you can leave the pump running and it'll automatically shut off once the job is done. As an added bonus, the gadget is available in a range of bright colours. £63.49, with an accompanying medium-sized bag. *amazon.co.uk*

@katerussell
katerussell.co.uk

FREQUENT FLYER

GROUNDING THE BOEING 737 MAX: WHAT'S THE IMPACT?

COUNTRIES WORLDWIDE ORDERED THE GROUNDING OF THE BOEING 737 MAX 8 AND MAX 9 JETS FOLLOWING THE FATAL CRASHES OF AN ETHIOPIAN AIRLINES FLIGHT IN OCTOBER AND INDONESIA'S LION AIR IN MARCH, THOUGHT TO HAVE BEEN CAUSED BY A SOFTWARE ISSUE. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR TRAVEL? WORDS: GARY NOAKES

Why are hundreds of 737s are still flying?

The single-aisle 737 entered commercial service in 1968 and is a proven workhorse with more than 10,000 sold and numerous versions produced as engine technology has advanced. The software problem is restricted to the MAX versions; all others, such as Ryanair's 450-strong 737-800 fleet, are unaffected.

Which airlines fly the MAX?

The only UK and Ireland MAX operators are TUI Airways and Norwegian Air Shuttle and both grounded their fleets after the UK Civil Aviation Authority banned the aircraft from its airspace. Jet2.com is another big 737 operator — it has nearly 70 737-800s and several older 737-300s, but no MAX versions in its fleet.

What if I've booked to fly on one?

Either the issue will be fixed and the MAX cleared to fly again, or a substitute aircraft will be found. The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) classes a grounding as an 'extraordinary circumstance', meaning that if the airline takes 'reasonable measures', offers an alternative or leases another aircraft, it isn't required to compensate you.

TUI Airways has five MAXs in its UK fleet and says the grounding has had a minimal impact with all routes operating as usual. Norwegian was bussing its Shannon and Cork passengers to Dublin for alternative flights to New York and Providence, but said it was working on 'more permanent measures'. It's also offering refunds and rebooking.

Is this the end of the MAX?

No, the MAX's fuel efficiency means it's the fastest-selling aircraft in Boeing's history with around 5,000 orders from more than 100 airlines for four versions. An added attraction is its transatlantic capability. A few airlines have cancelled orders, but most are sticking with it; American Airlines, for example, has a quarter of its 100 orders already in its fleet. The MAX will be fixed, but there may be some subtle rebranding of the name.

Just how did the MAX get clearance from US safety officials?

A good question and one now being debated, albeit too late. It will potentially lead to a shake-up, particularly now the lawsuits from the victim's families are being filed.

ISSUES WITH THE MAX

The MAX has larger engines than other 737s, which must be mounted higher and further forward, meaning that at lower speeds the nose can pitch upwards. To overcome this, Boeing fitted MCAS (Manoeuvring Characteristics Augmentation System). Both crashes are thought to have resulted from MCAS trying to correct a potential stall by pushing the nose down, with the pilots seemingly unable — and allegedly untrained — to manually override MCAS. It's also emerged that two warning lights were fitted only as optional extras and these will now be standard. Boeing is also introducing a software update, but until it's approved, the MAX remains grounded.

IMAGE: ALAMY

Rodrigues *Naturally...*

Rodrigues Tourism Office

Rodrigues Tourism Office
Rue de la solidarité, Port Mathurin,
Rodrigues Island

Office du Tourisme de Rodrigues

T +230 83 20 866 / 7
E info.rodrigues@intnet.mu

www.tourism-rodrigues.mu

4 WAYS TO FALL IN LOVE WITH *Corsica*

Corsica's coast is the perfect playground for watersports, but the island also has a lush, mountainous heart for nature lovers to explore

BELOW THE WAVES

Dolphins, groupers and Second World War wrecks are all easily spotted in Corsica's crystal-clear waters, with visibility reaching over 300ft at points. Corsica's rugged coastline continues underwater with breathtaking rock formations and vertiginous canyons, while the Lavezzi Marine Reserve, a short boat trip from Bonifacio, has hidden coves ideal for snorkelling, as well as 40 dive sites.

RIDING THE SURF

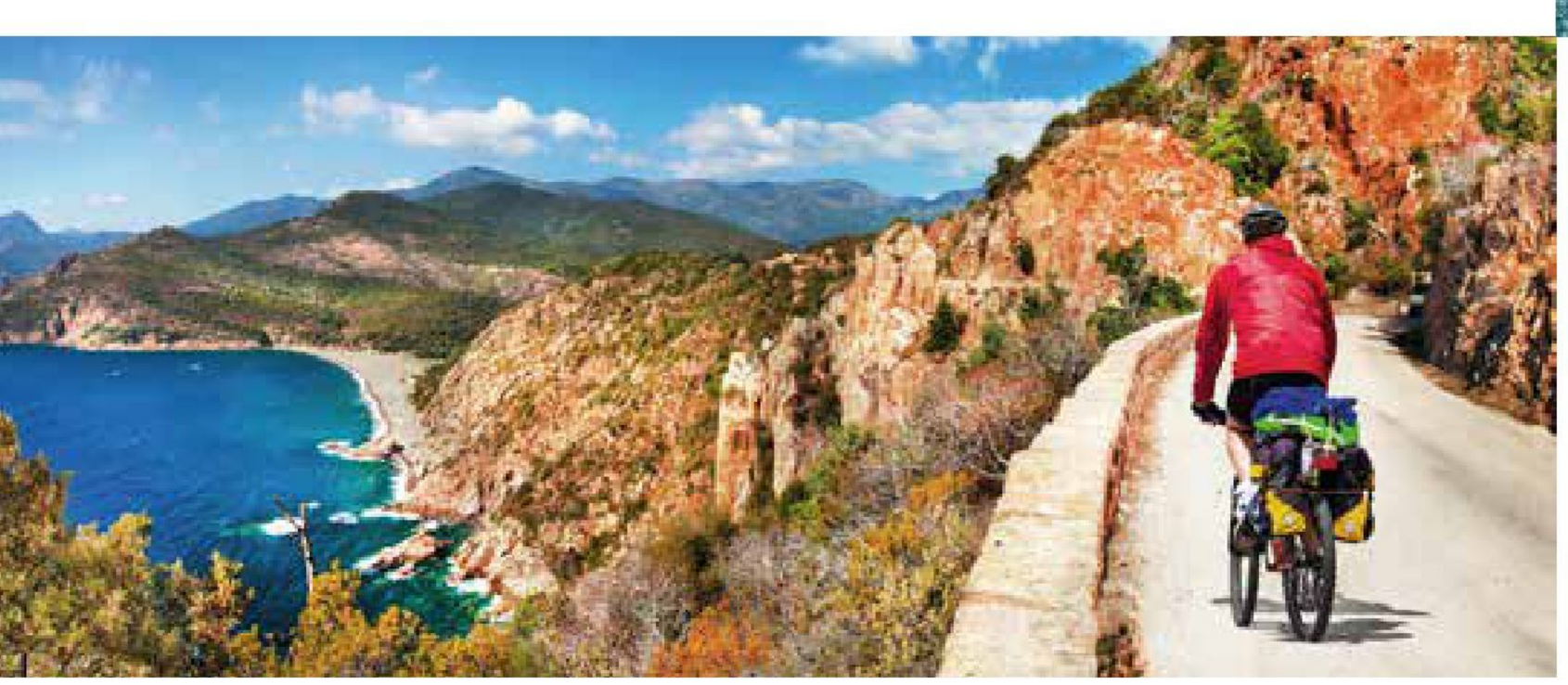
With around 200 beaches and more than 750 miles of coastline, Corsica has a plethora of hidden coves, sweeping bays and long sandy beaches that attract surfers in the autumn and winter months. The island gets reliable winds, especially on the south coast near Bonifacio, with a range of kitesurf schools for every level. Beginners should head to Figari, while Piantarella is famed for its warm, azure waters, with the best conditions from April to October.

ON TWO WHEELS

Whether you want to cycle through a mountain pass tackling challenging climbs and steep descents, or pedal leisurely through sleepy villages, Corsica has road and mountain bike routes to cater for every level. The island's long-distance cycling trails are some of the best in Europe, with the Coscione attracting top athletes, and opportunities to pedal the route of the 100th Tour de France (2013) down the scenic west coast.

IN THE MOUNTAINS

The greenest, most biodiverse and mountainous island in the Mediterranean, Corsica has around 120 peaks towering over 6,500ft. With close to 930 miles of footpaths and an abundance of mountain refuges, Parc Naturel Régional is perhaps the most renowned hiking area. Experienced hikers can tackle the GR 20 — a rugged trail that winds 111 miles along the jagged spine of Corsica's centre, from Calenzana in the north to Conca in the south.



ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE

From April, there are direct daily flights from London to Corsica's main airports: Bastia, Ajaccio, Calvi and Figari. From May, daily flights commence from Birmingham, Manchester and Southampton. Average flight time: 2hr 20min

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IMAGES: RALF GANTZHORN; FREESURF - FOTOLIA; BLAZEJ LYJAK

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IN THE NEXT ISSUE

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC
TRAVELLER
TRIPS OF A LIFETIME
Not all trips are equal. Whether it's for the stellar views or fabled history, there are some destinations that sparkle in the mind of travellers. So, for our next issue, we're embracing the iconic and setting off on some of the most epic itineraries in travel

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see page 196

IMAGE: GETTY

THE NET GAIN OF PLASTIC

IF WE DON'T TAKE ACTION BY 2050, THERE WILL BE MORE PLASTIC THAN FISH IN OUR SEAS. BUT BEYOND REDUCING OUR DEPENDENCE ON PLASTIC, IS THERE ANOTHER WAY OF LOOKING AT THINGS? AT THE ENDS OF THE EARTH, COMMUNITIES OF PATAGONIAN ENTREPRENEURS ARE LOOKING AT THE WORLD, THROUGH RECYCLED SHADES

WORDS: AARON MILLAR

In the shadow of the Yate Volcano, deep in the Cochamó Valley of northern Patagonia, dark rain clouds gather on the horizon, a cool breeze whips the water, and Pedro walks alone. The beach is littered with plastic, old fishing nets mostly, blown in by the prevailing winds from the trawling grounds further out to sea. He comes here most days to clean the beach. For years, no one helped him. No one paid him. He carried what he found back to his home a mile away. "Nature is God's face," he says. "It makes me angry to see people throwing trash onto it." Each day the wind would bring more plastic and he'd walk alone collecting it. But now, for the first time, it's getting easier. He works with a smile on his face. And that's thanks to, of all things, a pair of sunglasses.

The plastic Pedro collects goes to Karün, an eyewear company with a big vision. Set up by Patagonian local Thomas Kimber six years ago, Karün has flipped traditional economics on its head. Instead of exploiting resources, the business model is circular and regenerative. It links economy with conservation. It empowers local communities and has inspired genuine innovation by asking new questions.

"The biggest problems we're experiencing in the world today," Thomas says, "are symptoms of a way of thinking. If we want to make a change that lasts, we need to build new roads." At its most basic level, that new road is about transforming the way we think about waste. It's an ambitious task. In the UK alone, we produce more than 100 million tonnes a year — enough to fill the Royal Albert Hall every two hours. Waste is something we discard, something repellent. For Karün, it's a raw material.

Using wood from fallen trees, denim from old jeans, salmon skin from fisheries and, in Pedro's case, the plastic from discarded fishing nets, Karün is turning old crap into new cool. But it's the fishing nets that have, quite literally, spread the company's name around the world. Karün's Sailing Collection was codeveloped and worn by the professional yachtsmen and women of the 2017-18 Volvo Ocean Race, helping to raise awareness of plastic pollution in our ocean.

As far as waste goes, it was an obvious place to start. Eight million tonnes of plastic are dumped into the ocean every year. If we continue dumping plastic in the sea at the present rate, measured by weight, there will be more plastic than fish by 2050. Some 10% of that waste is discarded fishing gear. In the Great Pacific garbage patch — the mass of plastic trash floating somewhere between California and Hawaii — that number is closer to 50%.

But it's not just about cleaning up your local beach. We're addicted. Our packaging is full of it. Our drinks are wrapped in it. Even our clothes are filled with synthetic microplastics that drain into the ocean, ending up in our food chain. We don't just need to recycle, we need to change our entire mindset.

Plastic for life?

The Cochamó Valley is spectacular — it's known as the Yosemite of South America — lush mountain fjords, soaring cliffs, waterfalls pouring into deep blue lakes. But there aren't many jobs. After we helped Pedro

IMAGES: GETTY; PIA VERGARA

collect plastic nets on the beach, he invited us back to his house, where his wife Rosa had just opened a small roadside restaurant on the back porch. It turned out we were her first customers. There were chickens running through the yard, clouds kissing the snow-capped peaks and delicious empanadas hot from the oven, meat and vegetables, quinoa and cheese, gooey chocolate with raspberries fresh from the garden.

From plastic nets to empanadas. It's a good trade. Like all the people Karün works with, Pedro and his wife are entrepreneurs; it's a requisite that they must use that money as seed capital to invest in microenterprises of their own — in this case, Rosa's restaurant.

As is the contemporary wisdom: poverty is alleviated by entrepreneurship, not aid. And the social innovation in this case comes from a collaborative organisation called Balloon Latam. Set up by another Patagonian local, Sebastian Salinas, it now forms the backbone of what Karün does, working with a community, over a four-year period, to teach entrepreneurial skills that help transform passions and abilities into profitable cottage industries. It works because it's given gravity. They may be microbusinesses, but each is planned with the same macroeconomic levels of precision, care and expertise that are applied in boardrooms around the world.

The Karün model isn't perfect. Many environmentalists would argue the only solution to the problem of plastic pollution is to stop plastic use altogether. By creating yet another plastic product, albeit one made out of recycled materials, aren't they just delaying the inevitable? Ultimately, even these glasses will end up on a rubbish heap. Karün has two answers to this. The first one's practical: when you're finished with your sunglasses, send them back. Karün will recycle them and give you a discount on your next pair. The second one's deeper: this isn't really about recycling. It's about changing our perception of waste in general. If plastic can be transformed from into a desirable object, then wearing that product becomes a metaphor for that change.

It's about changing our perception of business too. The fashion industry is one of the top five most polluting industries in the world. If a sunglasses company can make a successful product, using a regenerative, rather than exploitative, model, who else might be inspired to follow suit?

There's also the question of long-term feasibility. What happens to Pedro and Rosa when all the nets are gone? By making communities reliant on a resource they're helping to diminish, aren't they setting them up to fail? Again, there are two answers. First: it won't happen soon. World Animal Protection reports that 640,000 tonnes of fishing gear is lost or abandoned in the ocean every year. We're moving towards a plastic-free society, but we're generations away; and while that shift is happening, we need to recycle and reuse as much as we can. Secondly, the entrepreneurial skills learnt by people like Pedro and Rosa are transferable — not just to other forms of

> Most of the people lived with what nature provided. We went to the ocean and took mussels and fish. Now, there's not much life in the sea and you need to wear shoes to protect yourself. But things are slowly changing. I'm going to die happy now that my recycling is being turned into glasses that are worn the world over.
>
> **Pedro Rubio**

waste, though that's also the case (discarded salmon skin from nearby salmon farms is used as a raw material by Karün and will seemingly offer a continual supply). But also, to other forms of business in general. That spark isn't extinguished when the waste is all gone. It's passed on to the next generation, and will continue to burn brighter the more it's used.

Plus, it's working. In 2018, the Cochamó Valley programme turned 20 tonnes of discarded fishing nets into seed capital for more than 200 microentrepreneurs. This year, that number is expected to grow by 50%. And, by linking conservation with economics, by making the prosperity of a village economically connected to the preservation of their land, they help protect the ecosystem and safeguard against outside development as well as regenerate the community at the same time.

Seeds of change

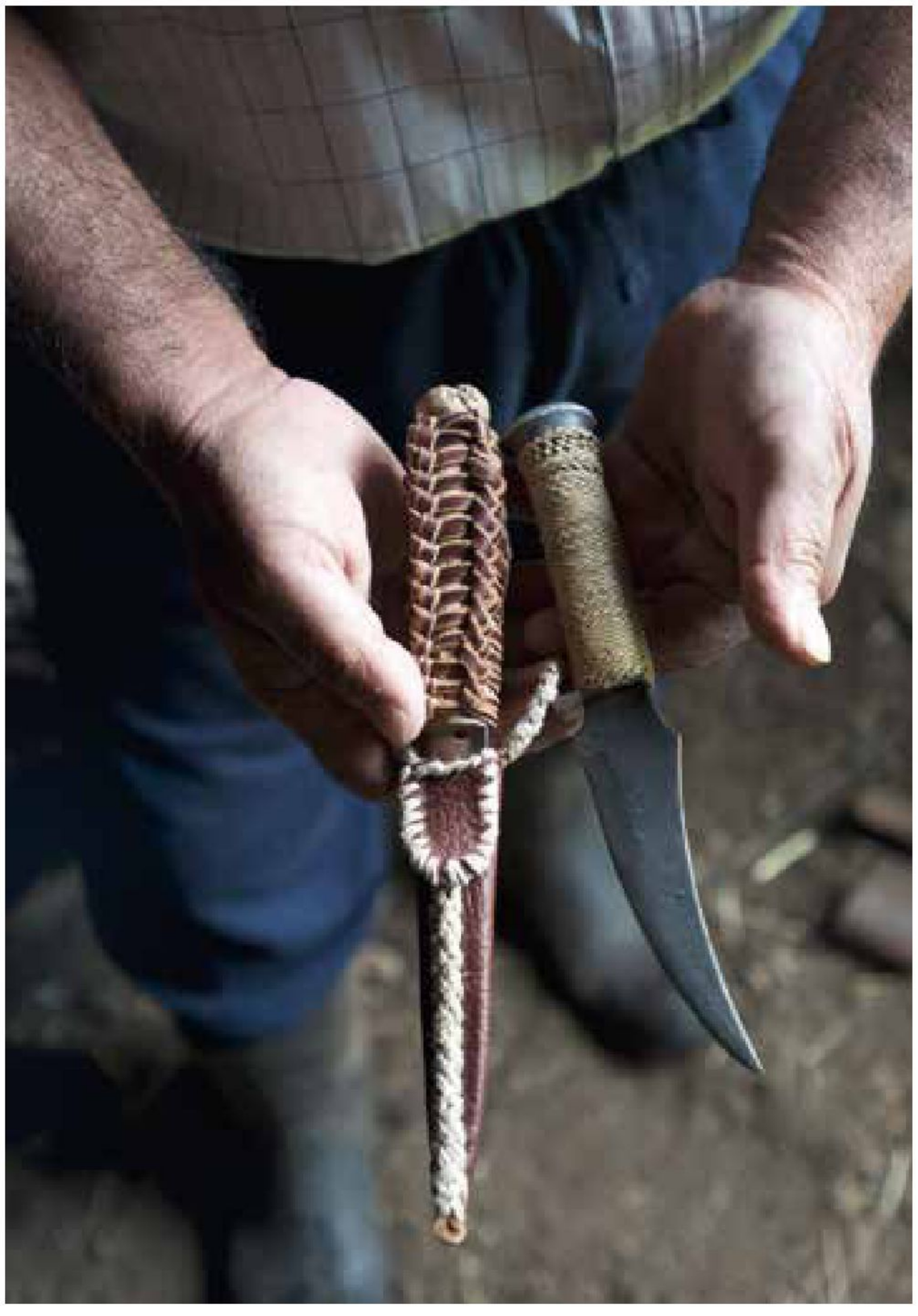
Later that afternoon, we drove a few miles down the road to meet a graduate of the programme. Elsa lives alone on a small patch of land overlooking the Reloncaví Estuary with strawberries growing in the garden and soaring mountains overhead. Her house is humble: two small rooms patchworked together with a wood-burning stove in the middle and a large wooden loom where she does her work on the side. But her spirit is huge. She gave us hugs, she made pastries, we passed maté around. She showed us how to weave, how to spin the wool, how she collects it from local shepherds, treats it and dyes it by hand, then threads it together to create bright patterns of green, blue and orange, which are turned into saddle bags, ponchos and, now, sheaths for sunglasses too.

"My boys," as she calls the shepherds, "helped me learn to appreciate my work." In a little over a year, Elsa has gone from lacking in confidence, ashamed of her art and giving it away, despite needing the money, to selling across the region, supporting herself and teaching other women in her community how to set up cottage industries of their own.

That night, we travelled up the bright turquoise waters of the Puelo River to the Karün Lodge, two small cabins on the edge of the water with a wood-fired hot tub and wraparound decks overlooking the flow. There are plans to turn it into a guest lodge, one day, a place for customers to come and see first-hand where their money is going.

But we were there to meet the neighbours: Jose Miguel Jara, who's used his seed capital to invest in a boat to take tourists on fly-fishing trips. Rony, a shepherd who lives high in the mountains and wants to show visitors his old trails. Pato, his son, who makes homemade knives out of recycled chainsaws and is setting up a workshop to make cases for Karün. We visited their farms, pigs, dogs and kittens roaming free. We sat together by the fire at night, swapping stories and drinking red wine. They told us of the difficulty of their lives, how they've struggled to raise their kids in such an isolated spot. How much it means to have someone visit, to have someone care.

How far could this be scaled? What about other disenfranchised communities around the world where poverty and pollution are a problem? We stayed up late into the night talking about plastic consumption in Asia and the West. Can the model be applied to cities? Can it help alleviate urban poverty or even homelessness? If we can transform waste into opportunities, and opportunities



IMAGES: AARON MILLAR

My parents were the first people to settle here in the 1920s. Back then it was easier to live close to the land. Today we're completely alone. Instead of working with animals, the younger generation are working with tourists. It's an income we never had. I hope they understand this and use this chance to build a better life.

Jose Miguel Jara

into prosperity, then the two billion tonnes we throw out every year become two billion sparks of inspiration and innovation.

It's already happening of course, Right now, around the world, there are companies that make skateboards out of recycled ocean plastic and others that produce designer clothes out of landfill. There are people offering technologies for free online that can transform used household plastic into jewellery, crockery and accessories. Youngsters are inventing machines to clean up our oceans, chemists are creating plastic bags that don't leak pollutants into the food chain. There's a change happening, a new wind blowing around the world; in the end, that new wind is what this is really all about. Because there's another reason Karün uses sunglasses as a vehicle for change — and it's perhaps the most important reason of all: you see the world through them.

And that comes back to the central question. Right now, we're coming to the end of an old story. For more than 200 years, since the dawn of the industrial age, human beings have seen themselves as masters of the planet. That mindset spurred exponential growth and remarkable advances in technology. But that old story has become unstable. The question is: can we turn the page?

"Sunglasses aren't going to change the world," Thomas said as the fire died down on our last night. "But if we can prove business can be done in a different way, then we can be a symbol of a new way of looking at the world."

PLASTIC FANTASTIC

Can plastic waste be an opportunity?

Precious Plastic
Open-source technology that allows anyone to transform their plastic waste into valuable objects, from brightly-coloured jewellery to mobile phone cases. *preciousplastic.com*

Econyl
Sourced entirely from ocean or landfill waste, Econyl manufactures the highest-grade recycled nylon on the market. It's helped revolutionise the fashion industry — dozens of brands, from Adidas to H&M, use the technology to create sustainable clothing and swimwear. *econyl.com*

The Ocean Cleanup
The brainchild of 24-year-old Dutch whizz-kid Boyan Slat, these enormous floating booms were deployed last year to help clean up the Great Pacific garbage patch. *theoceancleanup.com*

Bureo
Set up by three American surfers in 2014, Bureo makes skateboards, Frisbees, surf fins and the world's first 100%-sustainable Jenga set, all out of recycled fishing nets. *bureo.co*

SoluBag
Invented by a Chilean company last year, SoluBag is a new kind of plastic bag, made out of limestone instead of petroleum. It dissolves harmlessly on contact with water, helping to reduce ocean pollution and harmful micro-plastics leaking into the food chain. *solubag.cl*

IMAGE: AARON MILLAR

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IMAGE: GETTY

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APOLLO BAY
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THE GRAMPIANS
Journey inland to the Grampians National Park, a scenic area of sandstone ridges and jagged rock formations. Then take a bushwalk past the waterfalls to learn about the area's original inhabitants at the Aboriginal Cultural Centre.

BALLARAT
The main attraction here is the reconstructed 1850s mining community of Sovereign Hill, where staff in period dress show visitors how to pan for gold. Other highlights in the area include the historic 100-acre Botanical Gardens as well as Lake Wendouree.

IMAGES: GETTY: SUPERSTOCK; ALAMY

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★ STAR LETTER

It's the inside that counts

The April copy of *National Geographic Traveller* (UK) was lying on the doormat when we returned from a memorable stay in Gran Canaria. The 'Weekender' article inside was like reading a diary of our holiday. Like the author, we wondered why everyone flocks to the coast instead of heading to the wonderful landscape of the interior. But we were also grateful for the peace and quiet. On the caldera rim above the village of Tejeda, we paused on our hike to bask in sunshine and admire the vast valley below us. A couple of days later, we were walking the cobbled streets of Vegueta in Las Palmas, marvelling at the contrast between the Old Town and the modern hotel strip along the beach. I'm now reading the rest of your magazine for inspiration for our next trip! **CLAIRE TANSLEY**

Hometown glory

As a Kolkata girl I was extremely proud to see it appear in *National Geographic Traveller* (UK) (May, 2019). The article shared some great highlights, but I'd love to share a few more of my personal favourites. Shopping is an experience and though New Market remains the traditional hotspot, other areas not to be missed are the street markets of Hatibagan and Gariahat. Sari shopping along the length of Ram Mandir area showcases the traditional alongside the modern, and to get a sense for the Asian love of precious metals, it's worth visiting Bowbazar, which is full of gold and silver shops. **NANDINI CHAKRABORTY**

Turning the tide

I was very pleased to read your report, 'Can we save the coral reefs?' in the May issue of *National Geographic Traveller* (UK). This topic has at last been gaining traction in the media; it was also featured on the third episode of the BBC's *Blue Planet Live*. However, as a passionate environmentalist, I often feel the coverage I see simply doesn't state the scale of the problem explicitly enough. The fact is, if we don't do something about rising sea temperatures very soon, we're going to lose coral reefs entirely. And once they're gone, they'll almost certainly be gone for good, along with most of the incredible marine life they support. **GEOFFREY PARKER-TWEEDALE**

Chat back

NatGeoTravelUK

What's been your most memorable travel experience in Italy? #NGTUK

@MISSPALLEN Exploring Rome by Vespa with Scooteroma Tours — the best way to travel //
@AMIRMOH58 Few months back I visited Venice and it was one of my best experiences //
@GO_PHETCH Being in Sardinia in first week of October in a villa overlooking Spiaggia Di Marinella. The weather was still warm and there were virtually no crowds // **@BAZCHARLETON** I loved Trastevere. It was like a maze of a street party when I was there

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Every issue, we highlight the best photos you've shared with us on Instagram using #NGTUK

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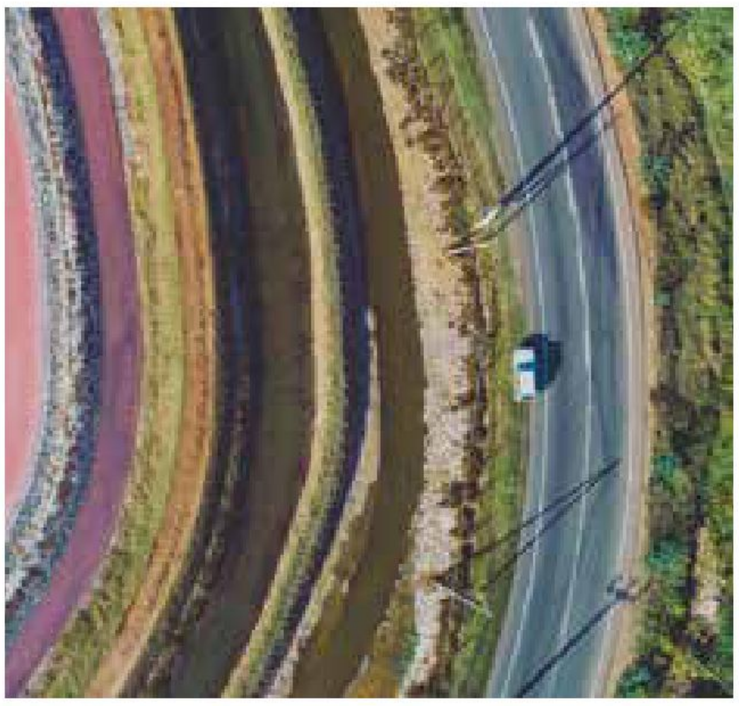

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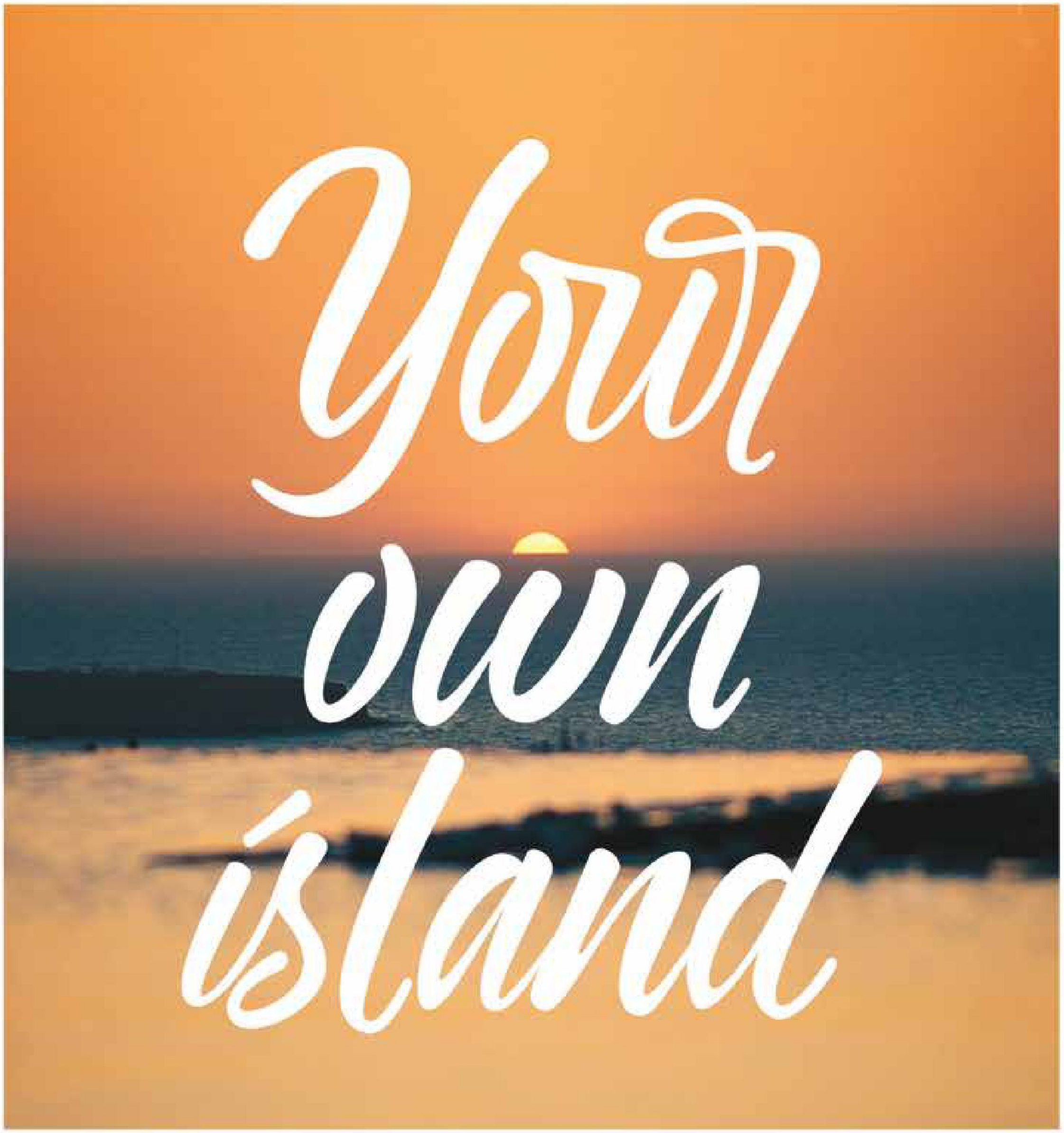

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